

Prifysgol Cymru

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

Will I need to start an OnlyFans to fund my dream career
in the arts?

Ellie Paget

2404461

BA Musical Theatre

ADPA6000 – Independent Project

Angharad Lee

01/04/2026

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of Copilot <https://copilot.microsoft.com/> on [1.04.26] to [Structure my work]. I used the prompt: "Can you simplify this structure to understand?" (Using the structure I already had.) / (using my success criteria) Can you create a better structure for a dissertation?

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly <https://app.grammarly.com/> from [01.04.26 to 10.05.26] to proofread my text, check for grammatical mistakes, and provide suggestions to rephrase my work.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI-generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before and after the use of AI tools, which I may be asked to provide in evidence."

Acknowledgement

This dissertation marks the end of a long and challenging journey, full of learning, self-discovery and many late nights. It would have been impossible to reach this point alone without all the love and support from everyone who's helped me. To whom I owe my deepest thanks.

My deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Angharad Lee, for allowing me the freedom to explore my ideas and for providing invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement, enabling me to write a research project that was enjoyable and something I am proud of. Thank you to all the participants in this research who generously gave their time and shared their experiences. Their contribution was essential for the development of this research.

A special thank you to my amazing parents for their constant love and unwavering belief in me. Your encouragement has pushed me to pursue my dreams, and I would not be who I am today without your support. Mam, our late-night chats and patiently listening to endless drafts; your presence kept me grounded when I needed it most.

To my boyfriend, Tyla, thank you for being my rock. Whether it was through your humour, your reminders to rest, or the much-needed ice cream breaks, you kept me smiling through the hardest moments. Finally, to my incredible friends both at university and beyond, thank you for the coffee shop dates, the gossip, the tears, and the laughter. Your support reminded me that I was never alone in this journey, and I am truly grateful to each of you.

Contents page

Introduction

Setting the stage.....	(pg.5)
Research Questions.....	(pg.6)
Methodological Approach.....	(pg.6)
Structure of the Dissertation.....	(pg. 6)

Chapter 2: Literature review

Dancing between paychecks.....	(pg.8)
The phantom of student loans.....	(pg.9)
The curtain closes on Wales funding.....	(pg. 11)
Only fans the encore everyone's talking about.....	(pg.12)

Chapter 3: Theoretical Exploration & Analytical Development (pg.14)

Devil's Advocate.....	(pg.16)
The voice of reason.....	(pg.19)
Synthesis.....	(pg.23)

Chapter 4: Critical Discussion and Conclusion

Surviving or thriving.....	(pg.24)
The price we're paying.....	(pg.24)
How far is too far.....	(pg.25)
The curtain call.....	(pg.25)

References.....	(pg.27)
-----------------	---------

Bibliography.....	(pg.34)
-------------------	---------

Appendices.....	(pg.37)
-----------------	----------

Chapter 1: Introduction

Setting the stage

This dissertation is situated within the academic field of Creative Industries Studies and focuses on the current challenges facing the performing arts sector. It considers the impact of funding reductions from Arts Council Wales and the increasing competition within the creative sector, both of which have made it significantly more difficult for emerging performers to establish sustainable careers. As financial support and opportunities continue to decline, many artists are forced to navigate an unstable professional environment. These conditions have made me raise the question of how I will financially sustain myself within such an unstable and unpredictable industry.

The study investigates the role of subscription-based platform OnlyFans as a potential alternative income strategy for performers. Although these platforms are often associated with adult content, they often feature a broader shift toward digital self-monetisation. As traditional pathways into the industry become limited, especially with intensified competition, performers are frequently required to adopt portfolio careers to remain financially stable. Artists are now expected to cultivate an online presence by using social media strategically to network, self-promote, and enhance employability within a competitive market. Reflecting a broader shift towards self-branding and the extensive measures performers must take to gain entry into the industry. Exploring these platforms raises important questions about stigma, professional identity, and whether digital self-monetisation may be a better way to earn money.

It's no secret that the arts sector is currently experiencing significant structural challenges, characterised by increasing financial instability among performers. In Wales, reductions in public arts funding with organisations such as the Arts Council of Wales have contributed to theatre closures and fewer funded projects. These changes directly affect the pathways available to emerging performers entering the industry. Despite investing in university training, which often leaves graduates with significant debt, many performers face further financial pressures as they establish their careers. The expenses, such as travelling to auditions, temporarily relocating for contracts, and supporting themselves between jobs, can make sustaining a career extremely challenging. At the same time, there is a growing perception that opportunities are limited by prioritising well-known celebrities for roles, leaving fewer opportunities for new performers to gain experience and visibility. These factors create a situation in which many performers feel they are spending money simply to remain in the industry, rather than earning enough to financially support themselves through their work.

This research holds personal significance as I prepare to enter the performing arts industry. As a student training for a career in musical theatre, I am increasingly aware of the financial instability that many performers experience. Observing the decline in arts funding, rising training costs, and increasing competition has led me to question the sustainability of a long-term career in this sector. Through this dissertation, I aim to critically explore alternative income strategies available to performers and consider whether pursuing a career in the arts remains financially viable. Or whether the industry

has become so unavailable that performers feel pressured to take more extreme measures to pursue their dreams.

Research Questions

The research questions explored are (1) How have recent funding reductions in the Welsh performing arts sector impacted the financial viability for emerging performers? (2) Does the rise of digital self-monetisation among performing arts graduates signify a fundamental failure in traditional arts funding? (3) Does the shift towards OnlyFans represent a desperate response to poverty in the arts, or a pursuit of financial gain?

Methodological Approach

This dissertation will adopt a theoretical and research-based methodological approach, utilising observational research methods to explore the realities faced by performers. A literature review will examine existing academic research on the performing arts industry and the financial vulnerability of the arts, establishing wider academic context and identifying key debates. The dissertation will also incorporate historical and thematic analyses to investigate how funding structures, employment patterns, and industry expectations have evolved. Conceptual analysis will be used to explore key ideas, including portfolio careers, self-branding, and digital self-monetisation. This will allow the research to critically examine how these concepts shape performers' experiences. Comparative textual analysis will be used to examine discussions surrounding digital income platforms and their relationship to performers. By comparing different perspectives within this study, the research will assess whether digital self-monetisation may be emerging as an alternative financial strategy for early-career performers.

Structure of the Dissertation

The first chapter will introduce the research topic and outline the current financial challenges facing the performing arts sector. It will establish the research aims, objectives, and questions, and introduce the significance of digital self-monetisation platforms such as OnlyFans within the wider context of creative labour.

The second chapter will examine the existing academic literature on labour in the creative industries. It will explore issues such as freelance employment, portfolio careers, low pay, unpaid labour, and graduate instability. The chapter will also discuss the impact of class and financial barriers associated with performing arts training, the failing Welsh performing arts sector, and the impact of funding reductions from organisations and theatres. The rise of digital self-monetisation within the creator economy critically examines platforms such as OnlyFans and TikTok as alternative sources of income for performers.

Chapter 3 will give you a deep, structured analysis of your chosen subject and introduce key theoretical frameworks that underpin this dissertation, such as identity theory, to explore how performers navigate identity, manage self-branding, and manage multiple income streams. Dramaturgical Theory explores the core theme of social media content, taking up the question of how performers can curate personas for financial

survival. while sociocultural highlights themes of funding cuts, career sustainability and how personal values and morals.

Chapter 4 presents findings from the qualitative research conducted for this dissertation, including interviews with participants and survey responses. Through thematic analysis, the chapter will explore performers' experiences of financial instability, attitudes towards digital monetisation, and perceptions of career sustainability within the arts sector.

The final chapter will synthesise the findings from both the literature review and primary research. It will evaluate whether digital self-monetisation represents a structural failure within the arts sector or an opportunity for performers. The dissertation will conclude by reflecting on whether OnlyFans has become the new fallback career path and whether I would consider it.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Dancing between paychecks

The creative industry is widely recognised for its precarious employment structure, irregular income, and intense competition. “While ‘traditional’ professions typically offer stable contracts and predictable career trajectories, scholars consistently highlight how employment in the creative sectors often relies on freelance labour and short-term projects, which intensify occupational uncertainty” (Gandini, 2019; Sutherland, 2020). The reliance on freelance contracts not only undermines financial stability but also leads to higher rates of career abandonment among creative professionals. For example, recent reports point to a “significant talent drain, as increasing numbers of practitioners exit the industry, citing chronic low pay, unsustainable working conditions, and, more recently, the amplified pressures brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to a 30% reduction in jobs in some areas.” (Wyman, 2025)

The combination of academic and industry research highlights the ongoing instability that affects jobs in creative fields. Industry surveys consistently underscore that instability within the Creative Industries is closely tied to financial insecurity for performers. Research and recent survey data reveal that “performers are often compelled to leave the sector due to a combination of poor work-life balance (85%), comparatively low pay (77%), and unsocial working hours (75%)” (Masso, 2023). This agreement between academic research and industry reports shows that several structural factors work together to create unstable working conditions and push people to leave the field. It further highlights the issues of financial insecurity and self-exploitation in the industry.

BECTU head Philippa Childs said that many theatre workers were “at breaking point” and “the industry cannot expect them to remain ‘for the love of the job’ when there is better pay and better-balanced working lives to be found elsewhere”. (Masso, 2023)

One of the hardest parts of employment in the creative industries is the frequency of freelance labour. Many creative workers operate as an independent contractor rather than salaried employees. “32% of the creative industries workforce as a whole is self-employed (including freelancers), compared with 16% of the UK workforce” (Easton & Beckett, 2021) While many people might be attracted to freelance work due to its perceived ability to offer greater flexibility (Gandini, 2019; Sutherland, 2020), But research has indicated, it is not without multiple challenges. In the UK, “such work is not only concentrated in low-wage sectors of the economy but is also associated with limited workplace rights and protections, with individual workers having no guaranteed minimum hours or reliable source of income.” (Hancock and Tyler, 2024) Without long-term contracts or institutional support, performers frequently bear full responsibility for securing employment, managing finances, and maintaining professional networks.

Students are seeing this financial crisis and are taking on a portfolio career. Elli Whitefoot states, “We found repeated evidence of graduates combining multiple sources of income, employment, freelancing, self-employment, often in ways that nurtured both security and creativity.” (Firth, 2022) Two-thirds (66%) of performance graduates work between four and five days a week. But only 45% of this group have a single paid role, with the rest having portfolio careers. (Mellors-Bourne and Hooley, 2020) “A portfolio

career involves monetising your skills in many ways and having multiple income sources, rather than a single job at one company.” (Legg, 2020) In the book Multi-Hyphen Method, Emma Gannon emphasises the importance of moving away from the old-school mindset that you have to pick one job and stick with it until you retire, showing that a traditional 9-5 is not your safest option. ” I was encouraged to pick one subject to study, one subject to master, but successes in my career have come from having multiple projects, goals and choices” (Gannon, 2026) The multi-hyphen method teaches the importance of having Flexibility, Autonomy and Curiosity “Being a multihyphenate is about choosing and strategizing a plan of attack and having the freedom to take on multiple projects, not being backed into a corner” (Gannon, 2026) This method suggests having multiple skills to be able to have multiple projects going on with different income streams to make up one salary therefore you will not be limited to one role. This can consist of taking on new classes” Will refreshing or maintaining your ability to speak a language other than English open new professional doors?” (Crane, Daniel C., 2026) Some popular jobs people take on include Teaching, Social Media Manager, Gigs, and showreel editor.

We are always told to succeed in the industry; we need to be a triple threat (actor, singer, dancer), so why are we limiting ourselves to 3 skills? Learning extra skills can not only secure me reliable employment alongside auditions but also supply me with new skills that could secure me a role. Picking up an instrument could be the missing chord in your career progression and help you stand out from other applicants, making a job offer more likely. “An article by the stage revealed “It's far cheaper to hire some actors who happen to be excellent musicians than an actor and a band”(The Stage, 2023) Debbie O'Brien, a leading casting director, told Backstage, “The team are looking for so many skills, and it is a real delight to see performers who are so versatile, talented, and dedicated to their profession.”(Mallett, 2020)

The phantom of student loans

Students are graduating with mounting debts, and the extra costs of auditioning make it difficult to sustain themselves, often pushing them toward more stable full-time work. Even before entering the industry, many are already burdened by the financial strain of tuition fees and university living expenses. Earning a degree in a relevant field is seen as essential for anyone pursuing a career in the creative industries. The Sutton Trust states that “accessing a creative degree allows someone to build up skills and networks required to enter related industries” (holt-white,2024, p. 24). And “In 2021, it shows over 70% of the creative workforce held a degree” (Communion, 2023). This recognises how essential a degree is to achieve success in your career. That's if you have the money to get in in the first place. “Equity found in a recent survey that two-thirds of working-class students and 56% of students overall were prevented from applying to training institutions due to audition fees and hidden course costs.”(Lister, 2025)

A BBC news article revealed that one student spent “more than £1,000 over two years simply auditioning to get into college.”(Lister, 2025) And it's not just the audition fees themselves, that's the problem. Another student quoted, “He spent around £700 on fees, travel, and preparatory training to audition for drama school over the course of

four years. (Lister, 2025) You also need to consider the cost of travelling and accommodation, as well as having the right equipment, such as dance shoes. University of the Creative Arts suggests “Project materials and equipment typically cost between £100-500 per year.” as well as “Printing and photocopying, which typically cost students around £15–£20 per year”. (University for the Creative Arts - UCA, 2020) With all these extra costs, it is believed that working-class students are being pushed out of the sector.

It is no secret that conservatoires and drama schools are predominantly attended by individuals from more affluent backgrounds. This was brought to light by The Sutton Trust, where it was found “At four universities, Oxford, Cambridge, King’s College London and Bath, more than half of students on creative courses come from the most elite ‘upper-middle-class’ backgrounds.” (Lewis Tibbs, 2024) An article by Greg Barradale, drawing on data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), highlights the proportion of privately educated students entering UK universities between 2017 and 2018. The statistics reveal that “the Royal College of Music reports the highest number of privately educated students at 68.9%, followed by the Royal Academy of Music at 61.2%” (Berridale, 2019). This demonstrates how access to conservatoire training is heavily influenced by socio-economic background, suggesting that financial privilege can significantly increase the likelihood of admission to drama schools. Dr Christina Scharff reports that young performers from low-income households are “significantly less likely to apply to a conservatoire in the first place due to ‘being less comfortable in the conservatory environment’” (Scharff 2019). As a result, inequality is embedded within the training pathway itself, reinforcing the idea that the performing arts industry remains unstable even before students have graduated.

Many conservatoires and drama schools offer bursaries to students from low-income backgrounds, typically based on whether their “annual household income falls below a certain amount.” These financial awards “aim to ensure that finance isn’t a barrier for students from less affluent backgrounds to pursue higher education.” (UCAS, 2020) Unfortunately, with the cost of living crisis, “Prices rose faster than increases in student loans in 2022 to 2023. leaving students in England with less money to cover their living costs. Some students struggled to afford their bills or food shopping.” (Swain, 2023) A survey taken by 261 equity members revealed that “(65%) of our student members who received a maintenance loan said it did not cover their living costs, with (76%) having to work and 15% going into debt to cover costs.” and a shocking “96% of respondents were told to spend their own money on supplies, resources and other expenses as a requirement of their course.” (Equity, 2024)

Equity announced its campaign to Abolish Audition Fees for drama schools and performing arts courses. “The campaign will also seek to address other obstacles that prevent aspiring artists from entering the performing arts industry, “and recently, the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama dropped their audition fees. stating “The development is part of a process aimed at widening opportunities for people of all backgrounds to access theatre training,” (The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, 2024), closely followed by Leeds Conservatoire.

There is a growing expectation that more universities and conservatoires need to adopt similar measures to improve accessibility, as current efforts are seen as insufficient. The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama has recently introduced an audition fee waiver for students from low-income backgrounds; while this appears to increase access, the eligibility criteria can be restrictive, making it less accessible than it may initially seem.

The Curtain closes on Wales's funding

Location plays a crucial role in building a successful career in the arts, with many students moving to London in pursuit of their big break. A survey released by Newcastle University revealed that up to “31% of arts and culture graduates from regions like the South East and East of England move to London for work within 15 months.”(McAndrew 2025) This is largely due to a lack of opportunities around UK towns and cities, limiting career opportunities unless individuals are willing to relocate or commute regularly.

Rachael Swindale from backstage states,

” Over 70% of the UK’s film production companies are based in the Southeast of England, and 54% of theatrical performances are in London.” (Swindale, 2017) With the recent funding cuts to Arts Council Wales, opportunities for me locally are becoming increasingly limited. The closure of National Theatre Wales has significantly reduced opportunities for passionate performers seeking to gain experience in the arts, as well as limiting spaces for creative expression. Delyth Jewell, MS Committee Chairman of the Senedd Wales, quotes “The lack of investment in facilities and in organisations will be a future where our young people are deprived of the chance to explore their talents and to represent Wales on the world stage.”(A decade of cuts: Impact of funding reductions for culture and sport, 2025)

National Theatre Wales had a huge impact on Wales’s creative arts. The company was established to work “*by, with and for the people of Wales.*” (Welsh National Theatre, 2018) Unfortunately, recent government funding cuts saw NTW lose its £1.6 million investment, with the organisation stating it will “cease to exist” following the loss of all its Arts Council Wales funding in 2023. and announcing it will not survive beyond April 2024. The NTW was just “1 out of 81 creative organisations dropped for funding in Wales”. (Bevan, 2023) This has seen a “25% decline in core government funding since 2010”, making Wales “the second lowest in Europe for investment in the arts per person.”(CREU CYMRU,2024)

Other theatres, such as Theatre Clwyd in North Wales and Na Nog in Neath, have warned of venue closures, job losses and reduced annual programming. Fryer from Nanog Stage Company told The Stage that “nearly 70% of the company's expenditure in 2024 was on cast, crew and creative fees, including subsistence and travel costs.”(Chambers, 2025) This poses a significant risk to the theatre, potentially leading to job losses and a reduction in the number of performances staged. A journal written by Creu Cymru suggests “Reduced funding directly correlates with reduced artistic output, employment and resources, placing unsustainable pressure on sector staff and limiting capacity across the board to support new projects.”(CREU CYMRU,2024)

A statistical report from the Welsh government in 2024 brags that “there are now 3,595 businesses operating in the creative industries in Wales, an increase of 11.8% on 2018 figures.”(GOV.WALES, 2024) Wales has companies such as the BBC in Cardiff and Bad Wolf that offer prestigious opportunities, but gaining entry into these organisations is extremely competitive. Without support, training routes, or industry connections, it can be difficult for individuals to access auditions or be noticed. As a result, many performers rely on these organisations and development programmes to help create pathways into the industry and increase their chances of being spotted.

Only fans, the encore everyone's talking about

The rapid rise of OnlyFans over the past decade illustrates a significant transformation in digital labour, personal branding, and the monetisation of identity in the online economy. There are “4.63 million creators on OnlyFans,” and it seems to be a more popular choice of employment. In February 2025, OnlyFans received approximately 179,522 requests to open creator accounts. (Statistics OnlyFans, 2025) It allows creators to earn directly from subscribers, creating a more immediate, transactional relationship between performers and audiences. So why is this unconventional and stigmatised career now being chosen over a traditional 9–5 job?

A recent article from the BBC highlights people using only fans as a second job to pay the bills, Laura Watson apart of a helpline for sex workers, states, "They need to make extra money to make ends meet with the price of everything going up."(Gruet, 2022)and it's paying off for lots of people.“ Quinn Everly started her OnlyFans to 'support her PhD in medical research, ' and eventually grew her platform to generate roughly \$30,000 per week in revenue.”(Mia Erickson, 2024) In a documentary by Olivia Atwood: Getting Filthy Rich, it is stated that “the majority of OnlyFans creators are university students trying to fund their degree or pay off their loans. (ITV, 2022) In one interview with Zoe Hogg, Zoe talks about leaving university during the pandemic with £31 in her account and is now making 20,000 a month, “it’s changed my life.” (ITV, 2022)

The world of being an OnlyFans creator is often described as degrading, but it's not that different from other social media platforms. It’s been described as “Instagram with a pay wall.” (Grazia, 2026) and is becoming one of the most popular social platforms with OnlyFans accounting for “20% of all visits to Google. This is followed by Twitter (9%), YouTube (6%), Instagram (5%), and Link tree (5%). “(Flisiuk, 2018) and for many creators, the content is not that different to what they would post on Instagram for free.

Many celebrities, such as Cardi B, Iggy Azalea, Sarah Dunn, and more, are all posting non sexual content “Bella Thorne declared she was joining the site but wouldn’t post nude content; she still made \$1m on her first day.”(Grazia, 2026) Lilly Allen has revealed that selling her feet on OnlyFans makes her more money than her Spotify streams. “The singer charges \$10 per month on her OnlyFans account, which would come out to at least \$10,000 monthly based on her subscriber count. In comparison, she currently has 7.5 million monthly listeners on Spotify, which pays out approximately \$.003 and \$.005 per stream.”(Moreau, 2024) Although it's not a necessity to post sexual content on the platform, “70-80% of OnlyFans digital content is of a pornographic nature.”(Flisiuk, 2018) And unless you already have a name in the industry, it is

believed that you won't do well unless everything is stripped back. Love Island star Josh Richie told Olivia Atwood, "He got away with it for 6 to 8 weeks" (ITV, 2022) before his money started plummeting, with people losing interest in his "PG content". He made "£12,000 from one video". (ITV, 2022) Despite the potential benefits of the money you can make, OnlyFans comes with a dark side. You will always be expected to do more and be pushed outside your limits and original boundaries you set for yourself "One day, you will wake up and realise the money and pressure drove you further than you ever thought you would go." (Moral Revolution, 2024) Money isn't as easy to make as you think in Olivia Atwood's documentary about OnlyFans. Atwood sets up her own account, posting content as she would usually on Instagram, and instantly experiences pressure to post nude content and harassing texts from men obsessing over her and nagging to talk or receive content. This behaviour can lead to stalkers or revenge porn.

An online court case on court TV broadcast the horrifying story of a 20-year-old man who was arrested after stalking an OnlyFans model and breaking into her home, where he allegedly stayed for several days and filmed her while she slept. "Investigators said Guerrero had taken explicit photos of the victim without her consent as she slept and placed a tracking device on her keys." (Brown, 2023) The idea of chasing easy money sounds tempting and a no-brainer, but the same project that offers a quick networking win could just as easily compromise your reputation and long-term well-being. It all depends on how far you are willing to go.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Exploration & Analytical Development

To deepen the analysis on the extent of instability within the performing arts and the growing use of sexual content platforms for income support. This study will utilise identity theory to examine how performers manage multiple income streams. The use of Dramaturgical Theory will examine how sexual platforms have evolved into a backstage for artists to perform, creating a persona to survive financially while trying to maintain their front-stage profession, to support access to more audition opportunities. Sociocultural frameworks argue that funding cuts created a significant sociocultural shift by abandoning government support, leaving the sector with no option but to support itself.

The instability of the performing arts sector is becoming increasingly apparent. I'm concerned that it may not offer the level of security I want in a career, making it difficult to see how I can achieve long-term goals like homeownership. Graduating from university means facing debt without any guarantee of steady work. There's an expectation to graft constantly, picking up opportunities whenever possible while juggling other jobs just to cover the costs of travel, networking, and auditions. The potential strain on my mental health could be significant. The idea of skipping meals just to afford travel to an audition doesn't feel sustainable or healthy, and it's not something I want to accept as normal. It seems like this lifestyle would be much easier with financial stability, which makes me question whether something like OnlyFans could provide that.

In the creative sector, entry-level pay is often low, insecure, or unpaid, leaving those without savings or external support more likely to drop out despite their talent. We're constantly told to "do it for the experience," expected to give our time and skills for free as if simply being allowed into a studio is a privilege in itself. I have found that the majority of roles I have had the opportunity to participate in are unpaid 'experience' roles. We are often told to get our foot in the door and network as much as possible to meet people who can put in a good word for us. But without an income to support us through this, it is not a viable way of living. Bethany Spain from the Sutton Trust stated, "I've stayed up late finishing freelance assignments after long shifts. I've paid for train tickets to 'opportunities' that didn't cover a sandwich, never mind accommodation. I've worked on campaigns that paid everyone except the young people involved." (Bethany Spain, 2025) Unfortunately, many performers, especially those from working-class backgrounds, cannot afford to have a sustainable job to support themselves. Further, supporting my theory that income, rather than talent, dictates the sector and who can afford to stay in the industry. This leaves performers no choice but to find alternative ways to earn income to support themselves through this unjust system.

Many graduates find themselves at a crossroads: they can start an entry-level corporate job that barely covers rent, or they can leverage the digital market through platforms like TikTok or OnlyFans, where personal branding can far exceed the starting salaries of minimum-wage jobs. The use of sexual content platforms serves as a "backstage", an alternative performance space where artists create a persona in order to sustain and protect their "frontstage" personas. By curating an online identity, performers can earn income while protecting their professional reputation and avoiding stigma that could jeopardise their mainstream opportunities. This extends to platforms like TikTok, where

performers project a carefully crafted "backstage" persona, offering audiences a sense of relatability and a glimpse into their everyday lives. This backstage persona is a strategically crafted front-stage performance, designed to strengthen personal branding and audience engagement. This raises concerns about the demands of self-marketing consuming the artist's private life, pushing personal boundaries to the point where it takes over your life rather than supports it. "Digital platforms have effectively abolished the 'backstage.'" "Performers are now required to maintain a 24-hour 'front stage' presence, where the intimacy of their private lives is the very currency required to secure professional attention." (Hancock and Tyler, 2025, pp.75–76).

There is a growing perception that financial rewards are outweighing personal values. A survey by Leeds University revealed that "more than 70% of UK sex workers have previously worked in healthcare, education or charities, while more than a third hold university degrees" (Taylor, 2015). These are roles that society depends on, jobs that should offer not only financial stability but also a strong sense of purpose, pride, and personal fulfilment. NHS workers, specifically, should be among the most morally fulfilling jobs, given that they directly help others and make a meaningful difference in people's lives. Yet it seems that, for many, the moral rewards of such careers are being overshadowed by the appeal of fast, substantial income and a lifestyle perceived as flexible and desirable. We are witnessing the death of pride as students are forced to choose between the moral fulfilment of their degrees and the financial survival offered by the dream lifestyle of online monetisation. OnlyFans data shows "The platform added 936,000 new creator accounts in the past year alone." (Statistics Only Fans, 2025b) I recognise this as a social cry for help. The sheer volume of individuals turning to these adult content platforms reveals the truth of our broken economic system: where individuals feel they must compromise their privacy and personal boundaries just to secure the financial stability that their degrees failed to provide. "Welfare cuts and the poverty they generate have a particular effect on women, who see their career options narrowing and forcing many of them to resort to sex work to cover basic costs for themselves and their families." (Prostitutes, 2012) It's not a choice, it's a must. "For many performers, the move to online platforms was not a strategic choice of career expansion, but an act of 'desperate digital labour' aimed at immediate socioeconomic survival." (Hancock and Tyler, 2025, pg.89)

Chapter 4:

Devil's Advocate

Everyone carries conflicting impulses, an Inna angel and a devil playing tug-of-war between practicality and social expectation. Yet my "devil's advocate" asks: how different is this, really, from professional acting? The content itself doesn't have to be explicit or controversial to be profitable. Take Aleya, a university student I interviewed who made "£2235 from 2 months' worth of content" (Aleya, 2026) just by posting her own dance routines "I just post choreography for the dances I have choreographed myself and some dance photos." (Aleya, 2026) this isn't fundamentally different from what people already share on public social media, except for one key factor she has the ability to monetise it. And why shouldn't she? Although sexualised content commands a significantly higher market value. Aleya noted that her highest-earning posts featured her in "shorts and a bralette". (paget2026) But that's hardly unusual; similar outfits are standard for performers on stage or in music videos. Artists across the entertainment industry regularly present themselves in revealing clothing as part of their work. Taking *Mou-lone Rough*, for example, or *Chicago*, both productions have extremely revealing clothing and incorporate sexualised dance routines. If mainstream pop stars like Sabrina Carpenter can incorporate provocative choreography into their live shows, why is it stigmatised when independent creators do the same to support themselves?

You create yourself a persona, a character if you will, playing it to earn money... sound familiar? Adopting an alias isn't just about secrecy but boundary-setting. It acts as a safety net against doxxing and ensures that the creator's digital footprint doesn't follow them into future jobs, auditions, or family gatherings. In an era where the internet never forgets, a fake name allows you to own your content without it owning your entire identity. And there are so many websites that will help you set your secret account up step by step. Leadiax suggests "Use a VPN during signup and posting to mask your IP and location. Create fresh social accounts and avoid linking a phone number, which can expose contacts." (Leadiax, 2025)

You retain full control over your account; you decide what to post, how much to charge, and who has access to your content. In this sense, it can offer a level of stability that the arts sector often struggles to provide. I spoke to Sam Williams, formerly a member of the up-and-coming Welsh band *Cardinal Black*. Following an extensive tour of Europe and America, Sam left the Welsh band in 2024. From the outside, their lifestyle seemed like a dream, hitting milestones, including recording at Abbey Road Studios and performing at the Royal Albert Hall. Sam's departure suggests a disconnect between public perception of the 'touring dream' and the industry's personal reality. I was interested in exploring his motivations to leave. Sam explained, "I left the band because I had to draw a line somewhere on earning money. For the 5 years I was in the band, I was never paid in cash for performances. I got paid about £80 per day for driving the band van across Europe, etc., but I wasn't paid for the musician part." (Williams 2026) Similarly, Aleya also voiced concerns about unpaid jobs: "Most of the work I have done is experience-based, unpaid. I am finding it hard to find professional opportunities." (Alaya 2026) The path to a stable career is often blocked when pay doesn't keep up with the

cost of living. If you aren't born with connections or lucky enough to be famous, you're forced to exhaust yourself working multiple gigs just to earn the right to compete. In a survey I conducted to explore perceptions of stability within the arts sector, respondents were asked: "How many part-time jobs do you have to support your career?" Of the participants, eight reported having no additional employment, five reported holding "one to two part-time jobs", and one reported holding between "two and three jobs" (paget, 2026). In the interview with Sam, he outlined several additional ways he earned income in addition to his band work. "I used to drive other bands around (took Skindred to Glastonbury and did multiple airport runs for them), I played for other bands, earning small amounts, taught bass and got quite heavily involved with investing." (Williams 2026). Why trade forty hours of your week for a subsistence wage when you can earn double or triple the amount from a few selfies? It's not just the easy way out; it's a strategic way up. It buys you the luxury of time to train, network, and position yourself to be discovered while everyone else is too busy working three jobs to even look up.

Having the flexibility will give you peace of mind that it's not your only income source. And for many, it means only working a few days a month. Katie Price revealed she works 1 day a month and "earns £50,000 to £80,000" (Atwood, 2022), featuring non-nude content and has also outlined plans to become one of the first in the UK to adopt AI in this space. Using the app OH Chat, she is developing a digital twin of her former Jordan persona from her modelling career. According to CNN, this "AI avatar is trained to mimic her voice, appearance and mannerisms. Jordan can 'sext' users, send voice notes and images, and provide on-demand intimacy at scale all without Price lifting a finger." (Kemp, 2025) This represents a new frontier of monetisation, a passive-income model in which the creator is virtually absent from the labour. It also raises questions about the future of the industry, as AI technology advances, it may become possible to create entirely customisable digital personas, enabling individuals to generate income without revealing their identity or actively producing content themselves. This technology opens doors to a future where you can achieve financial success without ever compromising your identity. Everything can be managed privately, away from the public eye and behind closed doors, although this is something to look forward to in the future. The current market is already brimming with endless choices and diverse ways to take control of your career right now.

Categories such as women called pay pigs or financial dominatrix sit on live chats with individuals who have a fetish for giving you money without expecting sexual services in return. "The act of being dominated and used for their money is the arousing part for the submissive partner." (Balestrieri, 2022) Practically, free money. Since these sessions are strictly one-on-one, the risk of public exposure is minimal. Unless your casting director happens to be a 'subscriber', your professional reputation remains untouched while your bank account grows. And if you are extremely cautious about showing your face, ASMR porn is a growing industry, and many voice actors are getting into it on the side. In an article by Mashable 101, they talk to a creator who goes by the name Scar-

lette Fever. She describes the job as "me sitting in a closet improvising different fantasies." (Irvine, 2023) These platforms can generate substantial revenue without the anxieties of public acknowledgement. A notable example is creator Gwen Gwiz, who leveraged her audience of over 400,000 subscribers on her primary ASMR channel and earns "between £2,222 and £7,410 a month." (Rimm, 2020)

For many, sexual content platforms provide a safety net that keeps their dreams from slipping away. The importance of this stability is underscored by survey data; for example, one participant noted that they only felt secure after obtaining a steady teaching post. "Yes, I gained a PGCE and have a secure job as a dance lecturer at the college. Ask me when I graduated, and I would have said no, as I was auditioning a lot to get a job." (Paget, 2026) This sad reality reveals feelings of being trapped by a lack of progress, and they find themselves forced to abandon their original dreams in favour of financial stability. One survey participant highlighted the importance of a diversified professional life: "I have built up a portfolio career over many years, so I can turn my hand to a lot of things." This feels vital for a sustainable portfolio career. My job could end tomorrow, but I am resilient and feel I could find something else. (Paget 2026)

This reliance on multiple income streams may present additional challenges for individuals from working-class backgrounds, who are more likely to depend on such diversification for financial security. Survey findings indicate that 85.7% of respondents believe that coming from a low-income background makes it more difficult to succeed in the industry and Underlined the barriers to starting a professional path in Wales, "I do think that if I were living somewhere like London, there would definitely be more opportunities, which would make it easier to climb the ladder quicker, but I believe Wales has a lot of opportunities as well". (Paget, 2026) I agree with this assessment; London remains the premier hub for accessible professional growth, though I had previously assumed Wales offered comparable levels of institutional support. However, my discussion with Sam regarding his experience with funding was eye-opening. I was shocked to discover that the only available support was "on the dole." Sam explained that the Welsh government didn't accept their application for a grant due to 'promoting Welshness. "The Welsh Gov funding saw us as not a good candidate because we were considered 'exports' (Welsh people playing music outside of Wales)" (Williams, 2026). Welsh artists are being penalised for seeking an international stage; instead of celebrating the talent nurtured in Wales, we should be pushing them to succeed. Instead of being restricted to local platforms like the Eisteddfod. There should be a greater push to help these artists succeed globally.

If monetising my image provides the financial stability needed to protect my mental health and keep my dreams alive, then that 'devil' on my shoulder is starting to click download. As long as the performing arts fail to provide a living wage, the next generation of talent won't be found waiting in the wings; they'll be building their empires behind a paywall. In the face of government abandonment, the 'download' button feels less like a temptation and more like the only viable exit. So, do I listen to the little devil and hit that download button...?

The voice of reason

Sometimes your inner devil drowns out your better judgment, but there's also another voice constantly nudging you toward what's right. Lately, mine have been in constant conflict over every possibility. Although the content platform is much easier and financially stable. I find myself questioning my own compass: am I pursuing this for genuine empowerment and safety, or have I let the lure of revenue cloud my purpose?"

What's posted on the internet stays forever; engaging in adult content creation carries a permanent risk that could overshadow your future achievements in the performing arts. It isn't just about the future you; there's an immediate threat of being caught by your inner circle. This doesn't just affect your privacy; it can fundamentally alter your relationships with friends and family. I asked Alaya her thoughts on whether doing this content would ruin her reputation. She stated, "I'm hoping that it doesn't make a difference to my employment as I've not posted anything explicit!" (Alaya 2026). However, I believe the mere stigma of having an account is often enough to "tar you with the same brush." It is a label that many professional circles still stereotype, regardless of the content shared. As stated in *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights*, "the 'whore stigma' is not an accidental byproduct of our 'backwards' attitudes to sex... Stigma is a boundary-marking mechanism... it marks out the 'good' woman from the 'bad', the 'respectable' from the 'unrespectable' (Smith and Mac, 2019, p. 18)

Even after deleting your accounts, your content is likely still archived and accessible, often on leak sites. This is a persistent digital footprint, frequently referred to as digital dust. An article from Vistech shares the potential risks of this, stating, "digital dust can pose security risks if it falls into the wrong hands. Hackers might exploit this data for identity theft or cyberattacks." (Vistech, 2024). This digital trail can lead to being typecast or having your talent overshadowed, resulting in immediate disqualification from roles before you walk into a room. This information could risk resurfacing during a major breakout role, jeopardising your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Furthermore, it can damage your agency's reputation, making it significantly harder for them to pitch you to high-profile productions or companies like Disney.

The longevity of both adult content creation and the performing arts is statistically limited. Many enter the world of content creation in their early 20s to tackle student debt or to fund their education, but few stay for the long haul. By their late 30s, many creators either pivot to more niche categories, such as MILF content, or opt to completely exit to lead a more private life. According to a 2026 market data report, "Only about 18% of creators are over the age of 35. Compared to "45% in the 25-35 category" (MESNIL-DREY, 2025), musical theatre also has a physical shelf life. If you don't transition into character roles, the industry often retires you by default. The industry is notoriously exhausting, making it nearly impossible for many to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Maintaining a schedule of eight shows a week is physically and mentally taxing. Especially when you have a family, the gruelling pace inevitably forces you to sacrifice the

moments and people that matter most. In a podcast 'call to stage', Amber Davies emphasises, "Eight shows a week is not for the weak. It's a huge commitment. By the time you have that one day off and relax, you've kind of got to get back on that treadmill again." (Call to Stage, 2025)

Research into career duration within the arts reveals a significant split in practitioner expectations; in a recent survey, participants were divided 50/50 on whether they would remain in the industry indefinitely, with one participant noting "The performing side of the industry can be age-sensitive, with fewer opportunities available as you get older, particularly in certain genres." (paget 2026) Transitioning to a new career path is common for performers; one participant stated they now do "Video editing" (paget 2026). while Sam has taken a new venture as a financial advisor, quoting, "Life is much, much better now!" (Williams, 2026) But working within education is usually a standard second act for many actors. One participant noted that their future likely involves "education, mentoring, consultancy or leadership within the arts, rather than leaving the sector entirely" (Paget, 2026). It is here that a history in adult media poses the greatest threat; strict institutional safeguarding policies disregard individuals with such digital footprints from working in schools or youth programs. For those whose Plan B involves teaching, the negative connotations associated with the adult industry create an instant insurmountable barrier to traditional employment.

The theatre industry is undergoing a digital transformation as social media becomes a powerhouse for networking and talent scouting. TikTok has emerged as a popular platform where aspiring performers can bypass traditional barriers to find their big break through viral exposure. Hannah Lowther serves as a definitive case study. Initially gaining exposure while working at Tesco, her online visibility served as a direct catalyst, propelling her into her first major professional role in the musical *Heathers*.

Industry experts often highlight the transformative power of these digital spaces. As Sam Williams (2026) notes, "TikTok is the biggest payer for musicians and can be accessed from anywhere. There is also a bit of a trend where 'home musicians' or complete novices are glorified into minor celebrities, which is only a positive. You can be from anywhere in the world and potentially succeed." Much like OnlyFans' subscription-based model, TikTok serves as a hybrid, generating direct revenue while also serving as a global platform. This heightened visibility is crucial for catching agents' and casting directors' attention. In an industry where marketability is the main priority, production houses often favour performers with established digital followings over unknown talent, as pre-existing celebrity status is a proven way to drive ticket sales. Unlike OnlyFans, TikTok's status is powerful, giving you the recognition you deserve, showcasing your talents and personality effectively, and making it easy and accessible to network. Leveraging social media is an increasingly effective strategy for monetisation; it diminishes reputational risk while reinforcing professional growth. This approach has already served as a definitive framework for success, launching the careers of countless creators who used these platforms to gain their initial foothold in the industry.

Although Amber Davies took a risky gamble entering Love Island in 2017 after graduating from Urdang and struggled to book a role straight after graduation. She described the process of applying for Love Island as “a real gamble for me. I had sleepless nights thinking, “Am I going to ruin a career?” (malm, 2025) Love Island is mainstream entertainment; its reliance on sexualized content, such as choreographed lap dances and intimate encounters, one could argue it is more problematic than platforms like OnlyFans because it’s aired on public TV, it reaches a far wider, younger audience that might never encounter adult-only sites. Unlike independent creators who choose their own boundaries, Love Island participants are subject to the directives of a production team and constant 24/7 surveillance, raising significant questions about genuine consent.

Despite this, Amber reflected on her island experience, describing it as “the best summer of my life, I don't regret it for a single second” (Call To Stage with Amber Davies, 2024 Ep 1) she quickly got back into theatre, where she went to her 9-to-5 audition, and describes getting “the golden ticket” when she was cast as Judy Burnley in 2018. Following that breakthrough, her career gained significant momentum, resulting in a steady stream of high-profile bookings. If a major reality platform can improve public perception rather than destroy it, it proves that strategic self-exposure is a valid and necessary tool for modern success. Amber used her platform to pivot back into her art, eventually landing career-defining roles. If she could successfully market her experience into a sustainable career, I am confident that I can use OnlyFans as a tool to achieve financial success and take control of my own image.

The amount of money you can make on TikTok is substantial. The platform has become a massive digital stage where everyone is competing to be discovered. offering robust monetisation without requiring explicit content. Once a creator establishes a substantial following, they can apply for the TikTok Creator Fund. This allows influencers to generate income directly from the platform, with pay based on video performance and view counts. Beyond static content, LIVE video sessions provide a space for real-time engagement. This feature allows fans to interact directly with performers and express their support through Virtual Gifts. As noted by TikTok’s Creator Academy, “With LIVE Gifts, your viewers can react and show appreciation for your content with Diamonds, which TikTok awards you based on how popular your LIVE sessions are.” (Creator Academy, 2026) These coins range from 1p to £500, depending on which coin you buy. Once you receive a coin, it goes straight into your creator fund.

Although a blog by Prettify suggests, “Creators typically receive around 30-50% of each gift's value after TikTok’s platform fees, depending on the gift” (Prettify, 2025). whereas OnlyFans takes a 20% cut and follows a strict 80/20 policy on all money made within the app, including tips. This is quite reasonable, considering that TikTok takes 50%, while other platforms like YouTube take 40%. I asked Alaya how she finds TikTok over OnlyFans “OnlyFans is more guaranteed, you have subscribers, whereas TikTok doesn’t have reliable users. They're there one day and gone the next.” (Alaya, 2026).

In the world of independent content creation, the fluctuation of a fanbase and the platform’s commission rate sits on a thin line between basic survival and financial stability. It is often the choice between a roof over one’s head or a meal, rather than the luxury of having both. Instead, she mentioned her opportunity of being sent free products, “I do

have the opportunity to be sent free products from companies to promote.” (Alaya, 2026) The more you build your page, the more opportunities you get for brands to reach out about paid partnerships where you promote a product and earn money on TikTok. From ‘SmallBizCassie’, she explains that she was asked to post a 1-minute video. I was paid \$12,000 for that one post. (smallbizcassie, 2018)

It's a fight between money and morals, navigating tension between two digital paths: one that offers immediate monetisation and another that requires slower, industry-aligned growth. While the allure of easy money and digital shortcuts promises more optimised living at the expense of traditional labour, it often comes at the cost of the self. True success is not found behind a paywall but in the respect and stability earned through meaningful contributions. By choosing the harder path of professional networking and traditional labour, you aren't just choosing a paycheck; you are choosing to enter a socially recognised path. A Participant stated, “I’ve started working for the NHS in the Ambulance service. I’m already making more money and feel more respected for the time and effort I put in. Unsociable hours are rewarded financially, and there is a chance of career progression if I should want it.” (paget 2026). These public sector roles offer "career progression" and a sense of being more respected. This theoretically re-frames "success" not as an increase of profit, but as the achievement of respect and stability.

While traditional jobs might offer lower immediate financial rewards, they lack the desperation found in the gig economy. Fogarty describes the reality of being a content creator not as a form of liberation, but as a gruelling hustle: “I found myself in humiliating, compromising situations just to make \$50 here or \$20 there. I was not 'free' or 'empowered.’ I was a slave to the dollar and to my subscribers.” (Fogarty, 2025)

When a creator finds themselves in "humiliating, compromising situations" for financial gain, the labour is no longer directed for their benefit, but becomes a degradation.

While OnlyFans has become a prominent alternative for many, it should not be seen as the only escape route.

Synthesis

A major theme in this analytical development is the economy's fragility. The dream of recording at Abbey Road or playing at the Royal Albert Hall (Williams, 2026) is theoretically inconsistent with the industry's wage. The data suggests that for Welsh artists, this uncertainty is inconsistent. When support, such as Welsh Government funding, is denied due to the lack of Welshness (Williams, 2026), Artists are forced into the Digital Economy. Platforms like TikTok and OnlyFans act as Occupational support, providing financial security that governments and arts councils fail to offer. The interviews with Aleya (2026) and Sam Williams (2026) highlight the theory that in musical theatre, the performer sells a skill; however, on a digital stage, the artist sells an identity. Aleya views her dance choreography as a professional product, yet the market rewarded the "shorts and bralette" (Aleya, 2026). This proves that the Strategic Way Up is not a sign of laziness, but a navigation of a broken system. The performer is forced to choose between Artistic Integrity and working three part-time jobs. Ultimately, the Synthesis demonstrates that the formation of AI and niche categories is not just a trend but the evolution of a portfolio career.

Chapter 5: Critical discussion& conclusion

Surviving or thriving?

The evidence suggests that the industry's current work-life balance is not only straining on artists but institutionalising a restrictive environment. As my research mentions, "increasing numbers of practitioners exit the industry, citing chronic low pay, unsustainable working conditions" (Wyman, 2025). Consistent with these observations, my survey results reflect " , I've seen very little in return for my investment in music. To give you an example, I had my PRS royalty cheque this week for all the times we've been played on radio stations around the world - it was £ 41.40" (Williams, 2026)

I believe the pursuit of a career in performance is often sold as a dream, with once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and a lifestyle that appears perfect from the outside. However, the practical reality of surviving in this industry can appear impossible. Success is not unattainable; however, the research indicates it requires a robust support system that many don't have. Financial stability is unattainable unless you reach the top tier, and even then, your security is tied to the expiration date of a strict contract. When traditional creative contracts offer neither longevity nor a living wage, practitioners are forced to seek alternatives to subsidise their careers. This financial strain makes the rebellious lifestyle on OnlyFans all the more enticing. It offers a path to the freedom and stability that the traditional industry lacks, ensuring you never have to choose between paying rent and attending a vital training workshop. Yet, while it provides the means to live the dream without the constant fear of Constraint, it is a choice that carries high costs. In many circumstances, I believe it's a rational economic response and a survival tool to keep afloat. Very few people would walk away from the opportunity to live a life of luxury.

The price we're paying

Especially when funding in Wales is at an all-time low, we are limited on where our funding comes from. As noted in the literature review, "The lack of investment in facilities and in organisations will be a future where our young people are deprived of the chance to explore their talents and to represent Wales on the world stage." (A decade of cuts: Impact of funding reductions for culture and sport, 2025). This suggests a future where Welsh identity on stage is diminished not by a lack of talent, but by a lack of support. However, data from the participant surveys offer a more nuanced response, indicating that funding streams do prioritise Welsh-based artists. "There are specific funding streams and project criteria that actively support or prioritise Welsh-based and homegrown artists. That can create opportunities that might be harder to access elsewhere". (Paget, 2026) The tension between available funding and actual accessibility is best exemplified by Sam Williams's experience. If we were to play at the Eisteddford etc., they'd have been more happy to look our direction, but we didn't fit the bill." (Williams, 2026) Ultimately, the discussion reveals that funding streams exist; they are often too narrow to accommodate the diversity of today's Welsh economy. The current

system appears to prioritise "what they want you to do" over the development of the artist. I believe that without a shift toward more inclusive funding, the arts risk being representative of young performers. The current system is fundamentally broken, seemingly designed to facilitate struggle rather than foster success. This failure creates an environment of sustained hardship that, if left unaddressed, I think will inevitably lead to a decline in the number of individuals able to sustain careers in the industry. Without major improvement, we face a future in which talent is excluded by the structure made to support it.

How far is too far?

I've determined that transitioning into explicit content creation is rarely a primary career choice; rather, driven by desperation. For many, the platform serves as a last resort. My findings indicate this with one participant stating, "I was struggling financially and needed the extra boost to support me through my studies." It can become quite expensive to fund equipment, auditions, and travel" (Alaya 2026). This mirrors cases in my literature review: "Quinn Everly started her OnlyFans to 'support her PhD in medical research,' and eventually grew her platform to generate roughly \$30,000 per week in revenue" (Mia Erickson, 2024). While many enter the industry seeking a temporary lifeline to regain their security, this short-term solution often evolves into a long-term career change. Leading to the realisation that you can generate significantly higher revenue in a fraction of the time compared to traditional labour, switching their perspectives from survival to profit. Which I believe brings significant damage to our future economy. If digital content creation is seen as more lucrative, it may diminish the need for standard employment. This shift could potentially destabilise the everyday jobs that society relies upon. We will have no one to run shops, deliver parcels, or empty bins. These are viewed as low-status jobs with a survival wage, known as invisible labour, as people only notice them when they're done. We could even see a decline in the industry, with less competition and fewer productions as digital labour is more lucrative.

The curtain call

In summary, this study has illustrated how the current economic climate and funding cuts have undermined the viability of traditional arts careers. The research identifies a significant shift toward digital self-monetisation as a response to this fundamental instability. While technically a choice, this move is often driven by a lack of reliable alternatives. Performers are effectively left to balance on a professional tightrope, where financial necessity constantly threatens standing within the industry.

Furthermore, this research has highlighted the evolving future of social media and AI; social media platforms are key for leveraging opportunities and have proven to be the new frontier for success in the industry. But the unknown abilities of AI have begun to reveal themselves and risk changing the game entirely, allowing you to leverage fame and financial success without being known. This technological enhancement complicates my argument; if AI allows creators to generate income and pursue their dreams without ever revealing their true identity, there is no risk of personal digital dust or reputational damage. This technological development may significantly reshape the visibility within digital creative economies, bypassing the need for a physical persona while

avoiding the sacrifice traditionally associated with independent content creation. Interesting to see how technology's impact could change this industry's stigma in the future and whether it will become a larger market for support. If 2/14 candidates in my survey responded yes to considering an OnlyFans account and 4/14 reported they 'might' (Paget, 2026), I wonder whether the statistics would change if the risks were reduced.

Will I need to start an OnlyFans to fund my dream career? The research demonstrates that Funding reductions, unstable employment patterns, unpaid work expectations, and rising training costs have created an environment in which performers are increasingly required to objectify both their skills and identities to sustain artistic careers. The research suggests that performers are no longer expected solely to demonstrate artistic talent, but also to maintain a constant digital presence to support employability. Ultimately, the rise of platforms such as OnlyFans among performers reflects both economic desperation and strategic adaptation. But morally, it raises complex questions surrounding personal values, self-respect, and professional identity, leaving individuals to negotiate their emotions and the moral implications of how much of themselves they are willing to capitalise on.

Ultimately, the research demonstrates that the tension between financial survival and personal ethics remains a pressing issue. The arts industry is currently failing its practitioners, forcing them to hide behind paywalls just to stay in the wings. Whether you hit "download" or choose the "harder path", the objective remains the same: finding a way to ensure that your worth as an artist is never eclipsed by your need to survive. While the devil on my shoulder is persistent, I ultimately do not believe I need to start an OnlyFans; my morals and personal values are too high to compromise on a shortcut. The risk of whore stigma or the potential for my talent to be overshadowed by a digital footprint that one day might lead to regret isn't worth it, especially when social media proves there is a middleman. Offering greater potential leverage for visibility and more job opportunities, rather than higher financial gain. I am choosing to build a future based on meaningful contribution. The download button may be a viable exit strategy for some people, but for me, the most sustainable career is one where I can look back at my journey without feeling I had to trade my identity for my art.

Reference list

A decade of cuts: Impact of funding reductions for culture and sport. (2025). Available at: <https://senedd.wales/media/ekumt3dy/cr-ld16899-e.pdf> [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Alaya (2026) interview on the insight into the OnlyFans platform. [personal interview] conducted by Ellie Paget.

Attwood, O. (2022). *Olivia Attwood: Getting Filthy Rich - Series 1 - Episode 1*. [online] ITVX. Available at: <https://www.itv.com/watch/olivia-attwood-getting-filthy-rich/10a2084/10a2084a0001> [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Atwood, O. (2022). *Olivia Attwood: Getting Filthy Rich - Series 4 - Episode 1 - ITVX*. ITVX. Available at: <https://www.itv.com/watch/olivia-attwood-getting-filthy-rich/10a2084/10a2084a0016> [Accessed 8 May 2026].

Balestrieri, D.K. (2022). *Financial Domination (FinDom) - What Is It About?* [online] Modern Intimacy. Available at: <https://www.modernintimacy.com/financial-domination-what-is-it-about/> [Accessed 26 Apr. 2026].

Barradale, G. (2019). *It's official: These are the country's most private school unis*. [online] The Tab. Available at: <https://archive.thetab.com/uk/2019/09/19/uk-private-school-universities-125931> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

Bethany Spain (2025). *Unpaid work is killing class diversity in the creative industries - The Sutton Trust*. [online] The Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/unpaid-work-is-killing-class-diversity-in-the-creative-industries/> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2026].

Bevan, N. (2023). National Theatre Wales shocked by 100% funding cut. *BBC News*. [online] 19 Dec. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-67760187> [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Brown, I. (2023). *NH v. Mauricio Guerrero: Stalker in the Attic Trial*. [online] Court TV. Available at: <https://www.courtTV.com/news/nh-v-mauricio-guerrero-stalker-in-the-attic-trial/> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2026].

Call To Stage with Amber Davies (2024). *Amber Davies Answers Your Questions! | Your 5 Minute Call with Amber Davies*. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BRvJH4FcEo> [Accessed 1 May 2026].

Call to Stage, (2025). Microsoft Teams. Spotify Available at: <https://teams.microsoft.com/l/message/48:notes/1778432941580?context=%7B%22contextType%22%3A%22chat%22%2C%22oid%22%3A%228%3Aorgid%3A3db2f464-07bc-4ac1-940f-5127cc87547b%22%7D> [Accessed 10 May 2026].

Chambers, K. (2025). *Welsh theatres warn of closures and job cuts without ‘immediate’ intervention*. [online] The Stage. Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/welsh-theatres-warn-of-closures-and-job-cuts-without-immediate-intervention> [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Comunian, L. (2023). *Making the Majority*. [online] Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/projects/creative-majority-education> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

Crane, Daniel C. (2026). *Sign in to your account*. [online] Proquest.com. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/878568006?accountid=130472&parentSessionId=qxaTuP6Y5K9JhKMD4IO0NgYqy%2Bjzdk3P1uUC%2Fk9r3CQ%3D&pq-origsite=primo&sourcetype=Trade%20Journals> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Creator Academy (2026). *TikTok Creator Academy: Empowering Creators to Grow and Succeed on TikTok | TikTok For Creator*. [online] www.tiktok.com. Available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/creator-academy/en/article/monetization-offerings-overview> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2026].

CREU CYMRU | SECTOR SNAPSHOT A collation of the shared experience and challenges facing the Creu Cymru membership in times of financial hardship. (2024). *CREU CYMRU | SECTOR SNAPSHOT*. [online] Available at: https://creucymru.com/sites/default/files/2025-01/Creu%20Cymru%20Sector%20Snapshot%20Research%20December%202024_0.pdf [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Easton, E. and Beckett, B. (2021). *Freelancers in the Creative Industries*. [online] Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Available at: https://pec.ac.uk/policy_briefing_entr/freelancers-in-the-creative-industries/ [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

Equity. (2024). *Break Down Barriers: Equity launches campaign to #AbolishAuditionFees for students* | Equity. [online] Available at: <https://www.equity.org.uk/news/2024/break-down-barriers-equity-launches-campaign-to-abolishauditionfees-for-students> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Firth, M. (2022). *Why ideas of graduate success need to catch up with portfolio careers*. [online] Wonkhe. Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/why-ideas-of-graduate-success-need-to-catch-up-with-portfolio-careers/> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

Flisiuk, K. (2018). *Is OnlyFans Affecting Gen Z's View of intimacy?* [online] Shorthandstories.com. Available at: <https://swlondoner.shorthandstories.com/is-onlyfans-affecting-gen-zs-view-of-intimacy/> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

Fogarty, T. (2025). *I Made Thousands On OnlyFans And Regret Every Dollar*. [online] Evie Magazine. Available at: <https://www.eviemagazine.com/post/i-made-thousands-on-onlyfans-and-regret-every-dollar> [Accessed 1 May 2026].

Gannon, E. (2026). *Spotify – Web Player*. [online] Spotify. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2vBy8RyZLkWE6Tr9RilyXE> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

GOV.WALES. (2024). *Latest figures show creative boom in Wales boosting the economy* | GOV.WALES. [online] Available at: https://www.gov.wales/latest-figures-show-creative-boom-wales-boosting-economy?utm_source=chatgpt.com [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Grazia (2026). *'I Started An OnlyFans In Lockdown And It's Not The Money Maker I Expected'*. [online] Grazia. Available at: <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/real-life/is-onlyfans-safe-uk/> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

Gruet, S. (2022). Cost of living: The people using OnlyFans as a second job to help with bills. *BBC News*. [online] 9 Aug. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-62377737> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

Hancock, P. and Tyler, M. (2024). *Performing Artists and Precarity*. [online] Palgrave Macmillan Cham. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66119-8>.

Hancock, P. and Tyler, M. (2025). *Shibboleth Authentication Request*. [online] Oclc.org, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.75–76. Available at: <https://research-ebSCO->

com.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org/c/onvpsy/ebook-viewer/pdf/pnnnceyi3b?location=https%25253A%25252F%25252Fresearch-ebsco-com.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org%25252Fc%25252Fonvpsy%25252Fsearch%25252Fdetails%25252Fpnnnceyi3b%25253Fdb%25253De001mww [Accessed 22 Apr. 2026].

Holt-White, E. (2024). *Access to the Workplace*. london: The Sutton Trust.

Iovine, A. (2023). *Audio erotica stars speak on the excitement and awkwardness of the job*. [online] Mashable. Available at: <https://mashable.com/article/audio-erotica-performers-interview-dipsea-audiodesires-quinn> [Accessed 26 Apr. 2026].

Kemp, O. (2025). *'She never sleeps': This platform wants to be OnlyFans for the AI era*. [online] CNN. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/06/21/tech/ohchat-onlyfans-for-the-ai-era-katie-price> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2026].

Leadiax. (2025). *Starting an Anonymous OnlyFans: Easy Guide*. [online] Available at: <https://leadiax.com/how-to-start-an-anonymous-onlyfans/> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2026].

Legg, B. (2020). *What Is A Portfolio Career?* [online] The Portfolio Collective. Available at: <https://portfolio-collective.com/content/articles/understanding-portfolio-work/what-is-a-portfolio-career/> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Lewis Tibbs (2024). *Research Reveals Stark Class Inequalities in Access to the Creative Industries - the Sutton Trust*. [online] The Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/research-reveals-stark-class-inequalities-in-access-to-the-creative-industries/> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

Lister, E. (2025). Drama school auditioning costs under the spotlight. *BBC News*. [online] 1 Jan. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gm7j0l09jo> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

Mallett, H. (2020). *How To Succeed as an Actor-Musician in the UK*. [online] Backstage.com. Available at: <https://www.backstage.com/uk/magazine/article/succeed-as-an-actor-musician-in-the-uk-72190/> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

malm, M. (2025). *Amber Davies: 'I had the most wonderful 3 years training at Urdang' – City St George's Alumni Network*. [online] City.ac.uk. Available at:

<https://blogs.city.ac.uk/city-alumni/2025/01/20/amber-davies-i-had-the-most-wonderful-3-years-training-at-urdang/> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2026].

Masso, G. (2023). *Talent drain poses 'existential threat' to theatre – BECTU*. [online] The Stage. Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/talent-drain-poses-existential-threat-to-theatre--bectu> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

McAndrew, S., O'Brien, D., Taylor, M. and Wang, R. (2025). State of the Nations research series HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE AND ARTS CULTURE SECTORS. *HIGHER EDUCATION AND THEARTS AND CULTURE SECTORS*. [online] doi:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15041124>.

Mellors-Bourne, R. and Hooley, T. (2020). *It helps to have more strings to your bow' Exploring the careers and success of graduates of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama A report commissioned by the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama*. [online] p.2. Available at: <https://vitae.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Exploring-the-careers-and-success-of-graduates-of-Conservatoire-for-Dance-and-Drama.pdf> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

MESNILDREY, S. (2025). *The OnlyFans Statistics You Should Know in 2026: Figures and Trends*. [online] Sales-hacking.com. Available at: <https://www.sales-hacking.com/en/post/statistiques-onlyfans> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2026].

Mia Erickson (2024). Why Are so Many university-educated Women Ditching Their Careers for OnlyFans? [online] Available at: <https://www.bodyandsoul.com.au/relationships/sex/why-are-women-ditching-their-careers-for-onlyfans/news-story/c05852dfb4562014963e1bb97c9204ad>.

Moral Revolution (2024). *The Dark Side of OnlyFans – Moral Revolution*. [online] Moralrevolution.com. Available at: <https://moralrevolution.com/the-dark-side-of-only-fans/> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2026].

Moreau, J. (2024). *Lily Allen OnlyFans Feet Pictures Make More Money Than Spotify*. [online] Variety. Available at: <https://variety.com/2024/music/news/lily-allen-onlyfans-feet-pictures-spotify-1236191247/> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

Paget, E (2026). Instability in the arts sector. Google Forms. Available at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1YNgJkWVGNCH5nGf1PlD7sBz-BGpK-UddS8YGg0ZaG9Q/edit#responses> (Accessed 8 May 2026).

Printify. (2025). *Table of Contents*. [online] Available at: <https://printify.com/blog/how-much-does-tiktok-pay/> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2026].

Prostitutes, E.C. of (2012). *The Prisma: Prostitution in the UK (I): Poverty, the driving force*. [online] English Collective of Prostitutes. Available at: <https://prostitutescollective.net/prostitution-in-the-uk-i-poverty-the-driving-force/> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2026].

Rimm, H. (2020). *Can You Get Rich On OnlyFans? It's Complicated*. [online] Refinery29.com. Available at: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2020/12/10230206/onlyfans-creators-make-money> [Accessed 27 Apr. 2026].

Scharff, C. (2019). *Breaking the Glass Ceiling in Music Education*. [online] Musicians Union. Available at: <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/breaking-the-class-ceiling-in-music-education> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

smallbizcassie (2018). *TikTok - Make Your Day*. *Tiktok.com*. Available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/@tiktokcreators/video/7455754481242737963> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2026].

smith, M. and Mac, J. (2019). *Google Books*. [online] Google.co.uk. Available at: https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Revolting_Prostitutes/e_EtDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=In+the+paperback+edition+of+%22Revolting+Prostitutes:+The+Fight+for+Sex+Workers%E2%80%99+Rights%22&pg=PP5&printsec=frontcover [Accessed 1 May 2026].

Statistics Only Fans. (2025a). *17 OnlyFans Statistics of 2025 (Creators, User Growth & Trends)*. [online] Available at: <https://ofstats.net/> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

Statistics Only Fans. (2025b). *17 OnlyFans Statistics of 2025 (Creators, User Growth & Trends)*. [online] Available at: <https://ofstats.net/> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2026].

Swain, H. (2023). *Student voices: Experiences of the rising cost of living - Office for National Statistics*. [online] [www.ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/studentvoicesexperiencesoftherisingcostofliving/2023-09-06). Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/studentvoicesexperiencesoftherisingcostofliving/2023-09-06> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Swindale, R. (2017). *Do You Have to Be Based in London to Be a Successful Actor in the U.K.?* [online] [Backstage.com](https://www.backstage.com). Available at: <https://www.backstage.com/uk/magazine/article/based-london-successful-actor-uk-4322/> [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Taylor, D. (2015). *Most sex workers have had jobs in health, education or charities – survey*. [online] [the Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/feb/27/most-sex-workers-jobs-health-education-charities-survey>.

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. (2024). *Central Removes Audition Fees for 2025 Entry | The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/news/audition-fees-removed-2025> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

The Stage. (2023). *Dear West End Producer: What's the difference between a trained actor-musician and an actor/musician?* [online] Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/dear-west-end-producer/dear-west-end-producer-whats-the-difference-between-a-trained-actor-musician-and-an-actormusician> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Times Higher Education (2022). *What can you do with a performing arts degree?* [online] Student. Available at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/subjects/what-can-you-do-performing-arts-degree?utm_source=chatgpt.com [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

UCAS. (2020). *Scholarships, grants, and bursaries: Low income households*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/money-and-student-life/money/scholarships-grants-and-bursaries/low-income-households#eligibility-criteria-> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

University for the Creative Arts - UCA. (2020). *University for the Creative Arts*. [online] Available at: <https://www.uca.ac.uk/study-at-uca/fees-finance/additional-costs/> [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

vistech (2024). *Understanding Digital Dust: What It Is and Why It Matters*. [online] VIS-TECH. Available at: <https://www.vistech.com/2024/05/digital-dust-what-it-is-and-why-it-matters/> [Accessed 28 Apr. 2026].

Welsh National Theatre (2018). *Welsh National Theatre*. [online] Welsh National Theatre. Available at: <https://www.welshnationaltheatre.com/> [Accessed 13 Apr. 2026].

Williams, S. (2026). Interview on the instability of the arts sector. [personal interview] conducted by Ellie Paget.

Wyman, A. (2025). *Is financial insecurity the biggest threat to the performing arts?* - *Arts Professional*. [online] Arts Professional. Available at: <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/feature/is-financial-insecurity-the-biggest-threat-to-the-performing-arts> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2026].

Bibliography

Bitdefender. (2025). *How to Prevent Doxxing When You're a Content Creator*. [online] Available at: <https://www.bitdefender.com/consumer/support/answer/106603/> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

by Katie Chambers (2023). *Arts Council of Wales accused of 'bending rules' for Michael Sheen's theatre company*. [online] The Stage. Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/arts-council-of-wales-accused-of-bending-rules-for-michael-sheens-theatre-company> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Creucymru.com. (2026). *Arts Council of Wales Budget Statement | Creu Cymru*. [online] Available at: <https://creucymru.com/news/arts-council-wales-budget-statement> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Evans, J. (2020). *'I Was Astonished': Why Are Unis Still Promoting Online Internships?* [online] Journo Resources. Available at: <https://www.journoresources.org.uk/universities-stop-promote-unpaid-internships/> [Accessed 23 Apr. 2026].

Frenette, A. and Dowd, T. (2020). *Careers in the Arts: Who Stays and Who Leaves? snaap special report SPRING 2020 with contributions from Rachel Skaggs and Trent Ryan*. [online] ERIC. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605409.pdf> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Get into Theatre. (2023). *What jobs can you do in between theatre jobs to earn? - Get into Theatre*. [online] Available at: <https://getintothetheatre.org/blog/what-flexible-survival-jobs-can-you-do-in-between-theatre-jobs-to-earn/> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

Hannah Gelbart (2025). *What in the World - Why some athletes and musicians are using OnlyFans as a side hustle - BBC Sounds*. [online] BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct73ny> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

ITV (2026). *Katie Price & Kerry Katona Discuss Why They Started OnlyFans | Olivia Attwood: Getting Filthy Rich*. [online] YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4knfgMNvF7o> [Accessed 10 May 2026].

Mediha Dilara Cılızoğlu (2024). Online Sex Work of Women on OnlyFans: Oppression or Empowerment? *Kadın/Woman 2000*, [online] 25(1), pp.39–56. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/jws/article/1430686> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2026].

Mizera-Pęczek, P., Krasnova, A., Sasin, M. and Sieczych-Kukawska, A. (2024). Dual careers as sustainable careers for performing artists in times of crisis. A contextual approach to the construct of a sustainable arts career. *PLOS ONE*, 19(12), p.e0314933. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0314933>.

S_kinski (2024). *Can I remain anonymous as a creator with OnlyFans? - Social Media Agency*. [online] Social Media Agency. Available at: <https://socialmediaagency.one/can-i-remain-anonymous-as-a-creator-with-onlyfans/> [Accessed 20 Apr. 2026].

secretgfdiary (2025). *Why I Quit Being an OnlyFans Creator*. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/@secretgfdiary/why-i-quit-being-an-onlyfans-creator-5ce04eb371a4> [Accessed 20 Apr. 2026].

Society of London Theatre. (2025). *The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment*. [online] Available at: <https://uktheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/05/SOLTUKT-State-Of-British-Theatre.pdf> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2026].

Stassen, E. (2024). *Financial Stability and Instability in a Musical Career: A Statistical and Sociological Analysis*. [online] UCONN Library. Available at: https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/1008/.

The Independent (2023). *Ambulance workers quit NHS for OnlyFans make daily wage ‘before getting out of bed’*. [online] YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpztP8D0sE> [Accessed 20 Apr. 2026].

Appendices

Interviews

Sam Williams-Cardinal Black

Why did you decide to leave the band?

1. I left the band because I had to draw a line somewhere on earning money. For the 5 years I was in the band, I was never paid in actual money for performance. I got paid about £80 per day for driving the band van across Europe etc. but I wasn't paid for the musician part. The other members were taking small (or quite large) cuts behind my back under the guise of 'admin' or because they felt they could. I was always told that we'll pay ourselves after the next tour, and then magically an opportunity came up which required all of the earnings of the tour to be spent on something else (e.g. hiring a sound engineer, sound desk and equipment for a tour supporting Peter Dinklage which would cost £8k). After the fifth year of no pay, I had to throw in the towel because I had spent every last penny of my savings.

How did you support yourself when in the band?

2. I sold my house! I sold my house in Quaker's Yard because I knew there would be a temporary lack of earnings, and I couldn't afford the mortgage without a job if I was to play music professionally. So, I knew I'd have some money from the house sale to keep me going whilst the band kicked off (because, you know, we were second away from earning loads of money apparently). When these swings dwindled, I started teaching bass part-time, but it was only pulling in around £80 per week. I briefly went on the dole and decided I needed to get some qualifications behind me so I could support myself either in the band or without it, so I studied and passed my CEMAP exams to be a mortgage broker, which led to a job that I'm still in now.

Were you working multiple jobs while in the band?

3. I used to drive other bands around (took Skindred to Glastonbury and did multiple airport runs for them), I played for other bands earning small amounts, taught bass and got quite heavily involved with investing, which sort of led to my path into financial services later on. It got me by, but it wasn't a glamorous life by any stretch. Some cool opportunities, but nothing solid or well-paying enough to move out or get my own place.

How much financial strain did the industry put on you?

4. massive financial strain. I worked hard to buy a house, renovated it top to bottom and sold it for a good profit and I used ALL of that money (around £40k) to live over 4 years. I had nothing to show for it other than great memories and photographs, but I've seen very little with regards to a return in my investment in music. To give you an example, I had my PRS royalty cheque this week for all the times we've been played on radio stations around the world - it was £41.40

Do you think if you had financial backing, you would still be in the band?

5. Yes. Being in a band that is seen as doing well gives you a massive ego boost, and being told you're on the cusp of something massive, and money is just around the corner, really has a strange effect on your mind. You're happy to lose money hand over fist because you feel it'll come back tenfold. The reality is that the other boys in the band were shits and had their own interests at heart, and even though they took payment themselves from the band and its ventures, it's still a losing game. They're all struggling to give themselves an income from the band and have had to look outside of music to make themselves comfortable. They also have rich wives in good jobs who pay for the family outgoings whilst they work away for months at a time to scrape by.

Did this affect your well-being?

6. massively - I was miserable for a long time. It's a perfect storm of feeling absolutely on top of the world when fans and magazines are raving about you, but you come home, and you can't afford to put fuel in your car. By day 4 of a tour, I was always miserable because I'd spent at least £300 on food and drink and had no idea when I'd get it back. I had 2 degrees, walked away from a successful career to pursue music, and it just didn't pay off financially. I gained a lot of experience, and my view of the world changed dramatically - people all over the world were enjoying their lives, working jobs they enjoyed and earning fantastic livings, and they weren't suffering. That part made me look quite hard at music and also contributed to leaving the music industry.

Was there any funding available to you for support?

7. Only the dole! We applied for grant funding from the Welsh government but as we weren't Welsh speakers or promoting 'Welshness' through our music, we were turned down. Other bands (or rather a small handful of people) knew the rules and would come up with a new 'band' every year and rinse the government funding by saying they were a Welsh language artist performing culturally in Wales, etc. The Welsh Gov funding saw us as not a good candidate because we were considered 'exports' - i.e., Welsh people playing music outside of Wales. If

we were to play at the Eisteddford etc. they'd have been more happy to look our direction, but we didn't fit the bill. A Nigerian artist playing an African instrument with his band actually had the Welsh music funding award and swept up all the Welsh Gov grants (Nfamady was his name, you can look him up!).

What job do you do now?

8. I'm a financial advisor now. I love it, I get a really in depth look at planning peoples financial lives and helping them make the best decisions for them. It's a bit ironic as I was never told or had access to the CB finances as it was 'all too complicated' or 'it's all fine' and now I actively help people with their finances, lol. There were more than a few questionable choices made behind closed doors in the CB camp that I almost certainly wouldn't have approved, including paying over £60k to record in Switzerland when we could've recorded the entire album in the UK for less than £10k!

Do you feel more stable within that career?

9. yes. 100% yes. I was always the outsider in CB and the other 3 members had played together for 10 years before I came onboard. They had an unwavering loyalty to each other and were happy to slit throats, give false information and generally felt they knew what was best when the finances said otherwise. I love my job now and life got a lot more enjoyable after leaving the music industry. In another life, I'd loved to have stayed in the music industry and continued travelling and playing all around the world but the lack of cash and the amount of sharks in the industry thinking they can make it by making underhanded deals was insane. I'm an intelligent person and always felt I wouldn't get screwed over by the music industry, but the whole system is rigged in favour of everyone but the artist. I did some incredible things like playing at The Royal Albert Hall and Abbey Road studios, toured Europe and America and met Tay along the way, but it was never going to be a long life. Even the lifestyle of crap food, endless beer and a horrific lifestyle meant that I was getting fatter and less healthy every tour. That took a huge toll on my mental and physical health. I love playing music and will always be in bands, but I'd rather play with technically 'worse' musicians who are lovely people than play with arseholes who think the world owes them something and they think they know how everything works. Life is much, much better now!

Alaya-Only fans creator

This creator would rather stay private. I will be referring to her as her 'stage name', Alaya

What made you want to join the OnlyFans platform?

1. I decided to join the platform, as I was struggling financially and needed the extra boost to support me through my studies, as it can become quite expensive to fund equipment, auditions and travel, especially because I study full-time.

How has the platform supported you?

2. It's helped me a lot; there's stability from the subscriptions, so I know I can trust it!

Do you post explicit content on there?

3. I don't post any explicit content. Some people think OnlyFans is purely based on explicit content, but you have the option to post whatever you want. Personally, I just post content of dances I have choreographed myself and some dance pictures.

Are you worried that doing this will ruin your brand?

4. I'm a bit worried as I do have a registered OnlyFans account and most people strictly believe it's just used for one thing. But I'm hoping that it doesn't make a difference to my employment as I've not posted anything explicit! It's nothing I wouldn't post on other social platforms or show to my nan.

With social media being very prominent in the industry, why didn't you choose platforms such as TikTok?

5. I think other platforms are good to use, especially TikTok at the moment. However, the main reason I started it was to get a bit of extra money, and I feel it's the easiest to make money from this, as OnlyFans is more guaranteed, you have subscribers, whereas TikTok doesn't have reliable users. They're there one day and gone the next.

How long have you been on the app for?

6. I've been using the app for around 2-3 months.

How much money have you made on there so far?

7. I've currently made £2235 from 2 months' worth of content, which is around 15-20 posts. Two of the highest earners did include me wearing shorts and a bralette.

How many posts have you done?

8. I would recommend it as it is a good way to earn money and show your talents off; however, it can become risky because of the platform's reputation. However, I also do TikTok. I'm not earning as much money there, but I do have the opportunity to be sent free products from companies to promote.

Would you recommend joining the app?

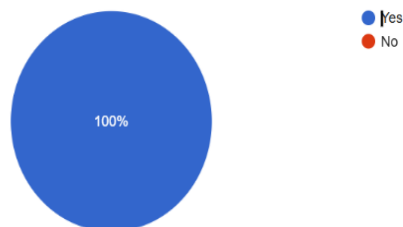
9. Currently, I feel as if I have more stability as I am earning money to support myself, and I'm not yet making money within musical theatre/dance. Most of the work I have done is experience-based, unpaid. I am finding it hard to find professional opportunities.

Survey

Do you consent to me using this data within my dissertation?

 [Copy chart](#)

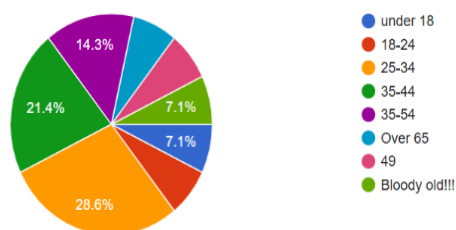
14 responses



Which age group do you fit in?

 [Copy chart](#)

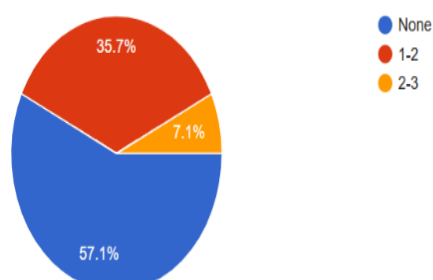
14 responses



How many part time jobs do you have to support your career?

 [Copy chart](#)

14 responses



Do you feel stable in your career? why?

14 responses

My daytime job yes but dancewise not really. Its very cute throat and a demanding environment for little money

No. There's not enough opportunity for people who start at 40 to enter an already saturated industry.

I chose to become a teacher of Drama and pursue my love of theatre through teaching drama and taking part in amdram

Yes

Now I do yes as I gained a PGCE and have a secure job as a dance lecturer at the college. Ask me when I graduated and I would have said no as I was auditioning a lot to get a job.

No

Yes and no. I have worked extremely hard to build and sustain myself in the music industry. That said, being self employed always comes with its own set of challenges especially as the work is never guaranteed.

With my part time job allowing me to afford basic essentials including car insurance and that I still live at home I am able to make a steady income and still audition.

No. I come from a low-income background and struggle to pursue my performing career and keep myself fed and housed.

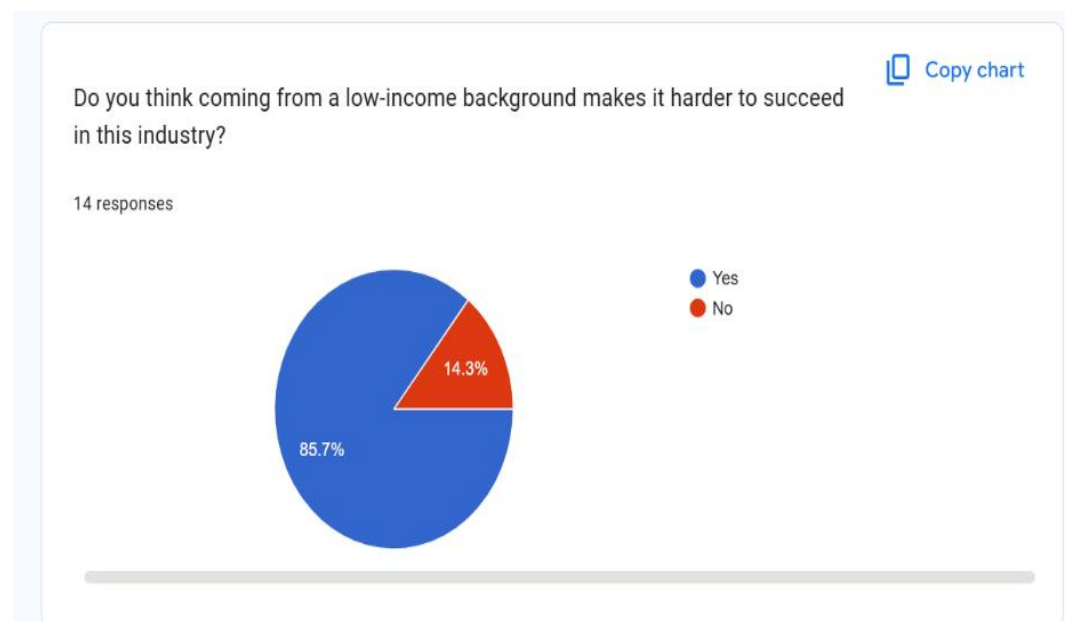
In my acting career, I sadly do not. Work is sporadic at best and over the last ten years, specifically in theatre, the money has not risen enough with the cost of living.

Although a career in the arts can never feel 100% stable, I feel relatively secure at the moment because I have developed multiple income streams within the music industry. These include performing, coaching, advising and examining...all under the broader arts umbrella. Diversifying in this way reduces financial risk. The more areas you actively engage in, the greater the likelihood of consistent work. For me, sustainability in the arts has come from breadth, adaptability and being proactive rather than relying on a single role.

Yes and no. I have built up a portfolio career over many years so can turn my hand to a lot of things. This feels vital in order to have a sustainable portfolio career. My job could end tomorrow but I am resilient and feel I could find something else.

Absolutely not! Not in my music career. I was always told by the other members/managers that we couldn't afford to pay ourselves until after 'X' event (tour, gig, photoshoot etc.) or after we'd finished this album etc. but pay never materialised. I played in Abbey Road Studios and The Royal Albert Hall within 2 months of each other and got paid a grand total of... £0. Nothing. For either of them. I was in a band that was, judging by social media, on the verge of something massive. The reality was that I was on Jobseeker's Allowance, using savings and trying to scrape together money from giving music lessons just to put fuel in my car. I did some mortgage broker qualifications on the road to help put me in a better position which ultimately put me on a better financial path. Bear in mind, I had 2 degrees, 7 years' experience in education and was in a band that was about to tour America. The reality was the people in the band with me already had partners that were in stable jobs and were not looking to ever make any money from the music industry. You can play anywhere for free, especially if you were willing to advertise on your social media channels to sell tickets and ultimately put money in someone else's pockets. As the consideration was not on money, every penny earns on the road was 'reinvested' (read: wasted) on meals out, more extravagant days off and in some cases placed into the back pockets of certain members who had holidays coming up but felt that they could justify it because they booked some hotels. Greed, deliberate uncertainty and the promise of 'something better' always got in the way of earning any money. To compare, I got paid more in one wedding gig than I did in 2 years' worth of touring.

Yes as won't ever be professional



Being a performer in Wales, do you feel like your opportunities are limited? why?

14 responses

Occasionally, however with network opportunities there are so many avenue to take
Not enough funding for the arts. Cardiff isn't a big enough city and not being a Welsh speaker, despite being Welsh, limits opportunities even further.
Since moving to Wales I have been with two groups a musical theatre group initially and now The Blsckwood Little Theatre.

Yes

I do for auditions for shows as all of those are held in London however social media and dance classes across wales are expanding and this does give performers a step on the ladder to get seen quicker, especially if you are actually skilled.
At times due to the stiff competition I'm often up against.

I haven't found my opportunities to be limited due to being a performer in Wales. I have worked with so many other musicians, venues and clients throughout Wales and the rest of the UK. I'm also able to vocal session work remotely. I do think if I was living in somewhere like London, there are definitely more opportunities which makes it easier to climb the ladder quicker, but I believe Wales definitely has a lot of opportunities.
Yes there arent alot of programmes to push young people into the arts like in England.

N/A

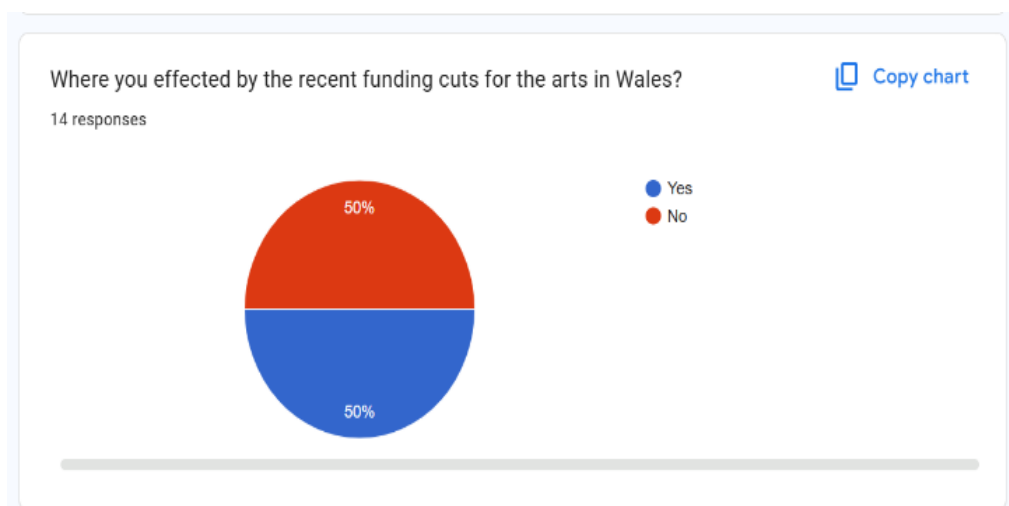
I think there is a stigma from certain aspects of the industry of "If you are not based in London, you're not worth the time" but this has become less. I think the Welsh government should push harder with casting Welsh performers for film/tv projects in Wales. The crew side is full of Welsh and Welsh based workers but the Welsh Government do not stand up for Welsh/Welsh based workers in front of the camera.

No, in reality I don't feel that my opportunities are limited by being based in Wales. In some respects, I think the opposite can be true. There are specific funding streams and project criteria that actively support or prioritise Welsh-based and homegrown artists. That can create opportunities that might be harder to access elsewhere. Geography within Wales can play a role in terms of logistics, but most professional performance work involves travel anyway. If you are willing to travel, whether within Wales, across the UK, or internationally – your base becomes less of a limitation. In my experience, adaptability and visibility are more important factors than location alone.

Yes. there are fewer stable jobs. Most jobs in theatre last 3 months.

Yes and no. Yes in the traditional sense that a lot of session musicians (musicians that go on the road with big artists) are generally from London due to their close proximity to label offices, executives etc. Session gigs in London are seen as better without any real reason; equipment is so good these days you can record an album in your bedroom and it'll be comparable to any studio around the world. You miss out on the opportunities which could lead to stable work. On the other hand, TikTok is the biggest payer for musicians and can be accessed from anywhere. There is also a bit of a trend where 'home musicians' or complete novices are glorified into minor celebrities, which is only a positive. You can be from anywhere in the world and potentially succeed, so social media was a great leveller for creatives. The barrier to entry is lower, but now there are now millions of people competing with you to be TikTok famous!

Yes with a. English accent



If you answered yes please explain how if effected you.

6 responses

I went from having to be employed by a venue to then renting the space to keep my classes going which I wanted to do for the community and sentimental value

It concerns me greatly that students cannot access the arts at school as Music and Drama are suffering from being taken out of mainstream curriculum. This means only children whose parents can afford to pay for extra curricular music or drama.

It's given teachers in the arts lack of space and funding for students to get into our courses. I was initially going to study musical theatre at Uni but with the changes to student finance Wales I chose to study a non-performing arts base course as I can't afford uni as it is let alone with no funding there is less money to go around so the competition for it is higher

Smaller grassroots venues closed down, which were a melting pot for meeting other musicians and establishing new connections. Gwdihw, The Moon Club and TJs in Newport to mention a few places that closed down either directly or indirectly due to funding cuts.

Where do you get your funding from?

14 responses

I don't receive any

Self-funded

The theatre applies for grants, each player/ show we put on must bring in funds for the next production. Directors, actors, and technicians, front of house give of their time voluntarily.

Projects

Local authority

My full time teaching job.

I find myself via singing and performing

I don't

My savings and wage from 2 jobs (I have previously had 3)

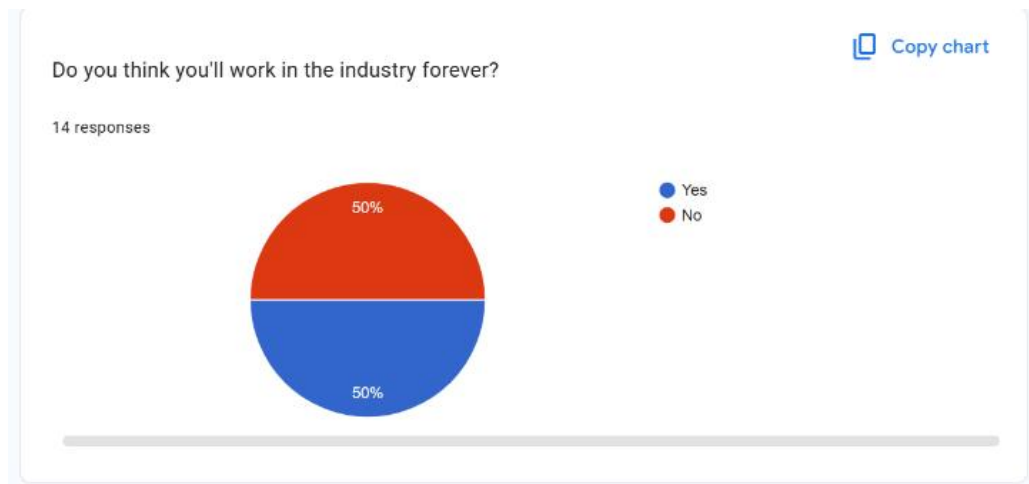
I have to work Full time jobs and negotiate time off.

N/A

Arts Council Wales mostly

My main job in finance and my wedding band.

I don't need funding



If answered no, explain why and what other career path would you go down?

7 responses

If it was my main job then I'd move to London and pursue it but I tried that once before and money wasn't great. I'd love to but in South Wales unless you work 23 hours a day it is sometimes not viable.

Video/editing. I'm a self-funded film director and making films on budgets of under £500 is almost impossible.

Teaching

I've started working for the NHS in the Ambulance service. I'm already making more money and feel more respected for the time and effort I put in. Unsociable hours are rewarded financially and there is a chance of career progression if I should want it.

While I hope to remain connected to the industry long-term, I don't necessarily see myself working in it in the same capacity forever. The performing side of the industry can be age-sensitive, with fewer opportunities available as you get older, particularly in certain genres. There are also structural realities to freelance arts work. Many of us do not have traditional employer pension schemes or long-term financial security, which inevitably influences thinking about later life and sustainability. I would likely move further into education, mentoring, consultancy or leadership within the arts, rather than leaving the sector entirely. My skill set is transferable into project management and advisory roles.

I think I would like to channel my creativity in a different area towards the end of my career. You only live once so let's try something different.

I answered yes, but I have two jobs. My main job keeps the lights on, enables me to keep one part of my brain active and has great prospects. My other job as a musician is as much social as it is a job. Unfortunately, I can't just be a musician as it doesn't pay enough to live the life I want.

Would you ever consider different means of finance, like only fans etc to fund yourself?

14 responses

