Abstract

A survey of 80 graduates of an Australian popular music degree revealed that graduates had a deep understanding of the value of soft skills to their employability and musical livelihoods. Soft skills are defined here as interpersonal and intrapersonal transferrable skills such as effective collaboration and communication, as opposed to the hard skills related to the technical requirements of a specific task. On breaking down the curriculum and pedagogical framework of the degree over its 3-year delivery, it is shown that the self-directed, collaborative and peer-learning environment is a major contributor to that understanding. The interpersonal and intrapersonal soft skills identified by graduates as essential outcomes of their learning are crucial to navigate the uncertainties of the portfolio career most music students will progress into. Embedding collaborative and entrepreneurial elements across all courses in the program content ensures they become intuitive practice for graduates, applicable across the range of roles they may engage with throughout their musical livelihoods.

Keywords

Soft skills; portfolio careers; popular music education; musical livelihoods
Introduction

As convenor of a popular music degree at an Australian Conservatorium for the past 10 years, I have overseen many changes to the curriculum and program design in response to the dynamics of the popular music industry (Lebler and Weston, 2015). The main aim of the degree – a Bachelor of Popular Music - is to provide graduates with the diverse skillsets that characterise contemporary popular music practice. This is approached through studying popular music history and analysis, audio engineering and production, songwriting and performance, and music industry studies. The principle graduate outcome target of the degree is a successful portfolio career for artists recording, performing and promoting their original work. The pedagogical framework is highly collaborative, informed by peer learning and is supported by a largely self-directed learning environment.

As part of a continuous cycle of review and revise, in 2018 I conducted an online survey of graduates, to which 80 responded, their various graduating years spanning the decade from 2005 - 2015. Two themes emerged strongly from their responses – that graduates were overwhelmingly engaged in what has recently become known as the portfolio career (Bartleet et al., 2019, 2020b); and that they valued the soft skills embedded in their learning as much as, if not more than, the hard skills. ‘Soft skills’, encompass a cluster of competencies also referred to as ‘life skills’, ‘social skills’ or ‘transferable skills’, and are often related to emotional intelligence, or EQ (Emotional Quotient) as opposed to the IQ (Intelligent Quotient) related to ‘hard skills’. Succi and Canovi describe soft skills as those that ‘include communication, teamwork, problem solving, critical and innovative thinking, creativity, self-confidence, ethical
understanding, capacity of lifelong learning, the ability to cope with uncertainty, as well as the willingness to accept responsibility’ (2020, 1835). They are defined by Hurrell (2009) as ‘involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts’ (p.397). Soft skills can be categorised into an interpersonal cluster including communication, team skills and planning and organising, and a cognitive (intrapersonal) cluster which includes enterprise, entrepreneurship, innovation, analytical capability and problem solving (Ferguson, 2010). Bridgstock (2009) adds that soft skills are ‘appealing to multiple employers across multiple work contexts and disciplines’ (p.32). Higher education institutions and researchers have been increasingly focussing their attention on the importance of soft skills and how best to develop these skills in students (Yan, Yinghong, Lui, Whiteside, and Tsey, 2019), with particular attention to developing soft skills specific to their chosen employment which will best prepare them to compete and excel (Ghazali and Bennett, 2017; Slaughter, 2008; Wheeler, 2016; Yan et al., 2019).

This article discusses the findings of the survey described above, in the context of relevant literature supporting the critical value of soft skills to sustaining musical livelihoods, and identifies the key elements of the curriculum and pedagogical framework in which they are embedded. It begins with an analysis of the survey findings, crystallising these into distinct coded themes which are then discussed and contextualised within relevant literature. Having identified the soft skills deemed the most important to graduates’ careers, the article concludes with a discussion as to how they can be successfully embedded in popular music curriculum and pedagogical design.
Context and Methods

Before moving on to the survey analysis, some background to the popular music degree under discussion is needed to contextualize the results. Despite modifications over the years, the degree has continued to be based on 4 streams, one course per semester in each, over the 3 years of the program. The streams are Audio Engineering and Production; Songwriting; Music History and Analysis; and the Major Study. While the first three streams are self-explanatory, the major study is more complex. For this stream, students work independently in collaboration with their peers across all years, and submit a folio of original songs at the end of each semester, which is peer-assessed by panels of students. There is no instrumental tuition in the program, and there are no directed ensembles. Students have complete creative freedom to write and record whatever they want, with whomever they want. This framework is representative of the way popular musicians learn outside of formalised education (Green, 2001, 2006), ‘under their own direction, intrinsically motivated, self-monitored, often using recordings of their heroes as texts and recordings of their own work as significant objects of constructive reflection’ (Lebler and Weston, 2015, 125). It is not unusual for students to experiment across a range of styles and collaborators before ‘finding’ their own musical identity, usually toward the end of second year.

The survey was distributed through a closed Facebook group, normally used to organize collaborations, ask for advice (usually technical), advertise student gigs and releases, and any other music related information. The group has 540 members, consisting of past and present students and staff. Before distributing the survey, I
opened a “Where Are You Now” forum in the group, in which 82 graduates participated, having graduated between 2005 and 2015. The total number of graduation numbers for that period was 311, giving a representative response rate of 26%. Around 400 of the Facebook group members are graduates, giving a 20% response rate from the entire pool. Not all are active members, and also, of course, there are many graduates who are active in the industry but who either do not use Facebook, or do not engage in the Facebook group. It is also important to note that those working in the music industry may have been more likely to respond to the survey, and this would have some impact on the data. For that reason, the data under discussion here is not intended to be indicative of the graduate outcomes of the degree, but rather as an analysis of responses from students who have demonstrated that they have achieved those outcomes.

**Analysis: Postgraduate Employment**

Of the respondents, 96% were working in the music industry. Of these, 84% were performers, singer-songwriters, or playing in a band. Recording studio work – as audio engineer and/or producer – accounted for 25%, while 19% were employed as live sound technicians. Primary, secondary and tertiary music education paid the wages of 36% of graduates, while 16% were employed in business aspects of the music industry, such as sales, PR, or artist management. Obviously, there is crossover between these figures, with the majority of graduates drawing income from more than one source. 44% of graduates were deriving their income from a single source - these were primarily the performers and the educators. However, 35% had two music related income sources, 12% had three, and 9% were managing 4 music-related jobs. This data is consistent with what is most commonly known as the
portfolio career, which requires transferable skills, both specialist and generic. Portfolio musicians are multi-skilled and flexible performing artists who are able to engage with multifarious aspects of both the music industry and related (and often non-related) industries.

Insufficient work and the resulting financial stress are some of the most common sources of career challenge reported by musicians (Bartleet et al., 2020d). As a result of this impermanent and competitive job market, musicians often work in multiple concurrent roles. The Australian Research Council funded study *Making Music Work* investigated career musicians from all genres, and the findings support those of the popular music graduates above. The researchers describe how ‘most musicians reported either one (37.31%) or two (26.65%) current roles, but 21.06% held either three, four or five current roles and 14.97% indicated that they were not currently working’ (Bartleet et al., 2020a, 9). This is comparable to the findings of the popular music graduate survey of 44%, 35%, 12% and 9% respectively. Moreover, almost all the musicians in the survey who reported having only one role were ‘working in education institutions or as studio teachers’ (Bartleet et al., 2020d, 3). This would indicate the majority of performers are supplementing their income with other music or non-music related work, with teaching being one of the most common means (Bartlett and Tolmie, 2018; Ghazali and Bennett, 2017). Again, this aligns with the graduate survey, which showed that most graduates were employed as performers and educators. The breadth of technical, or hard skills necessitated by the range of employment activities represented by the portfolio career presents a challenge to music graduates. As will be discussed further on, it is this breadth that soft skills such as adaptability and resilience are well-positioned to support. The breadth of
employment of the portfolio career raises the question of how higher education music studies could scaffold such diverse career outcomes. This was addressed in the following set of questions.

Following the online forum, graduates were then invited to take part in an online survey, to which 53 responded. They were firstly asked:

**Q2 What kinds of employment are you engaged in that are relevant to your studies? (tick as many as applicable)**

![Figure 1: Occupation Graph](image-url)
While there is more detail in these responses, the results are not surprisingly consistent with those of the larger “Where are you now” forum, with performing artist constituting over 68% of responses, 40% working in studio sound, 20% in live sound, and with music educator across the private, secondary school and higher education sectors collectively dominating the responses.

More detail was also available with respect to these portfolio careers, with Question 3 asking respondents to specify primary and secondary incomes. Only 17% of respondents indicated their sole income was derived from being a professional performing artist. 30% of respondents indicated that their primary income was as a performing artist. Where performing was not the sole income, 30% derived their income from some form of music education. 18% of respondents indicated their sole income was derived from music education, while 44% of respondents derived their primary income as music educators, fairly evenly split between secondary school and higher education. 13% of the graduates were employed in music-related technical roles as their only income source. This included product specialist for an audio company, in-house engineer; technical officer; and freelance audio engineer; and artist manager. Only 13% of graduates were employed in a non-music related primary job, 66% of which have music related secondary income including performer, teaching, producer, and audio engineer.
In summary, 87% of graduates were engaged in music-related professions, with as many performers as music educators deriving their sole income from their profession. A similar balance was seen between those drawing their main income from performance or education. Music education dominated the secondary income sources. Of the 13% of respondents who did not draw their main income from a music-specific career, 66% were still engaged in musical activity as a secondary income source. These figures indicate that the higher education music studies they had engaged them had not only prepared them well for a musical career, but for one with multiple applications – the portfolio career. What aspects then of their studies had prepared them for such diverse musical career outcomes?

It has been well documented that the majority of music graduates engage with portfolio careers (Bartleet et al., 2019; 2020d), and the findings of the graduate survey
support this. These careers also frequently ‘involve multiple part-time and/or casual roles, prioritise the individual’s own creative work, range across music and non-music related work, and have moderate total but low creative incomes (Bartleet et al., 2020b, 16). This prioritisation of creative work also emerged as a finding of the graduate survey, as well as an almost equal role of music educator. It is with these outcomes in mind that the second section of the survey was designed, to unpack which aspects of a diverse learning and curricular environment might inform diverse career outcomes.

**Analysis: Reflection on Learning**

To determine the relationship between the learning environment and career outcomes, the second part of the graduate survey asked which aspects of their learning students found most relevant to their musical livelihoods. The responses were dominated by graduates clearly identifying soft skills which were mostly *implicit* in the curriculum design and pedagogical framework. In this section of the survey, I asked graduates to reflect on three of the four streams described at the start of this article: the Major Study, the audio engineering and production stream, and the music history and analysis stream, and to comment on which, if any, aspects of those courses informed their current employment. The songwriting stream was not included in the survey as it had undergone significant revisions over the period covered by the graduates, meaning that the responses would have been too inconsistent to yield reliable data. I then coded the responses into themes.

**Q1: Thinking back to your Major Study lectures and assessment – what aspects do you think continue to inform your employment now?**
The Major Study is the focal point of the degree, and all other streams are designed to inform it. The weekly lectures consist of presentations by guests representing a range of music industry related careers from performers and composers, session musicians, and producers, to music lawyers, managers and labels, each offering a different perspective on the breadth of the industry. Students are assessed not only on their creative work, but also on their participation in assessment peer panel, their peer feedback, and also a written journal in which they are asked to reflect on their creative development over the semester. During the initial analysis, it became clear that the responses to this question could be coded into hard and soft skills. It also became apparent reading the responses that most of the soft skills derived from assessment, while the hard skills derived from the lecture content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Lectures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical listening and analysis</td>
<td>Learning about multi-income careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td>Music business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>How to deal with people in the industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal communication skills</td>
<td>Knowledge of industry workings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in self-expression</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed learning</td>
<td>Managing an artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reflection</td>
<td>Project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Aspects Informing Current Employment**

Stand out themes were collaboration, communication, critical listening and reflection, and self-direction. These soft skills were fairly evenly spread between the interpersonal and the intrapersonal. This of course should not be surprising as these characteristics constitute the pedagogical basis of degree, align with the literature on popular music education, and manifest most obviously in this course. However, what
is surprising is that these aspects were identified as informing current employment more than more obvious hard skills such as recording and performance, and industry knowledge through visiting industry representatives. Given that the majority of respondents were working as performers in the music industry, it is encouraging that they were able to identify the importance of these interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to their livelihoods.

Q2: Thinking back to your Audio Engineering and Production classes - what aspects do you think continue to inform your employment now?

These courses are designed to both support the pedagogy of self-directed learning through the development of critical listening and self-directed learning skills, as well to provide tuition in an increasingly important component of the performing artist’s skillset – the recording studio. Assessment for this course comprises various combinations of assessment including peer and educator assessment of the hard recording, written critical reflection, and conventional written examination. By the end of first year students are able to complete a multi-tracked recording of their original material. By the end of second year, students’ recordings include advanced engineering techniques as well as some form of music production application as a means to represent a strong artistic (style/genre) product. Students are encouraged to develop their critical listening skills by way of self-directed application. In third year, the focus is on audio production and the studio as a creative tool. Students work as artists and/or producers in a studio context and are introduced to theories of creative flow in the studio. Most graduate performing artists would spend their time on the ‘other side of the glass’ (being recorded), and a comparatively small percentage of
graduates work in sound recording and production (as reflected in the ‘where are you now’ responses). The responses coded below largely reflect that ratio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft Skills</th>
<th>Hard Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills transferability</td>
<td>Develop innovative ways to teach music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional confidence</td>
<td>Application as a session musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical and critical listening skills</td>
<td>Songwriting and arranging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate musical ideas</td>
<td>Audiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work and interaction with others</td>
<td>Knowledge of jargon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth through self-directed learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication between colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Hard and Soft Skills from Studio Courses

Perhaps because of the dominance of performer graduates, none of the responses referred to specific hard skills such as DAW operation, specific software, outboard gear, mixing etc. All of the respondents referred to relevant soft skills, grouped in the table above, while just under half of the responses referred to hard skills. The soft skillset identified was dominated by interpersonal communicative skills, however the responses did not specify communication ‘in the studio’, but rather pointed to broader interpersonal skillset, recognizing the value of such skills beyond the recording studio. Given that a key focus in third year is the communication of musical ideas in the recording studio, these responses are not surprising in themselves, but as with the major study, it is encouraging that they are remembered and valued post-graduation.

_Q3: Thinking back to your Music History and Analysis classes - what aspects do you think continue to inform your employment now?_
The ability to creatively and effectively listen to music analytically is widely seen as an important skill for producers of music to possess, and these skills are central to the courses in this stream. These courses are based on semiotic analysis, which embeds skills particular to the creative development of the artist through developing the tools and language with which to deconstruct and describe one’s own creative practice. While the popular music history focus of these courses broadens students’ musical vocabulary and gives them an understanding of the context of their own creative practice (and often stimulates new approaches and ideas), semiotic analysis as the theoretical underpinning develops essential critical listening skills. Assessment consists of quizzes, research essays and semiotic analysis. These are the least liked courses in the degree because they are not practice-based. In prior research (Weston and Byron, 2015), students expressed a ‘resistance to deconstructing what is seen as an intuitive’ (63). The responses to this question were therefore quite surprising, as they demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of the courses to creative practice.

The following table shows examples of the kinds of long responses given, and from which the themes were coded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft Skills</th>
<th>Hard Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysing the songs you're writing helps you understand what your creative direction is</td>
<td>Analysis reveals current trends and trying to predict how they will develop and then using that to come up with a marketing strategy for bands/artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught me to write and express my thoughts and requirements in an educated and professional manner</td>
<td>I play and write better when I understand how a song works; Context and analysis understanding helps in songwriting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for cognitive thinking which helps anyone in most employment situations.</td>
<td>Semiotics is used in about everything I do professionally, helping with sound design in film understanding sounds,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The responses to this question could be coded into three broad hard skills: applying analysis to songwriting; using analytical skills to tap into the market; and broadly applying analysis skills outside of songwriting through the development of musical language (see also Author and Author b, 2015). These three broad hard skills underpin the music history courses so it is not surprising to see them emerge. Some skills crossed over – for example, some responses referred to analysis to inform creative direction which, while related to songwriting, is far less specific than responses that pointed to using analysis to identify musical elements. Responses aligning with soft skills referred more broadly to analytical skills such as problem-solving, thinking, using the imagination and, as in the table above, specifically to cognitive thinking. Other responses identified ways in which music analysis skills could be adapted to other situations. While the soft skills identified in the major study and studio courses were clearly aligned with the collaborative learning environment, these courses are delivered in a traditional lecture format, with no opportunity for collaboration. This difference is reflected in the example soft skillset in the table above, which focuses far more on critical thinking than interpersonal skills.

**Q4: Thinking back to your Music Industry classes (including Major Study Class presenters) - what aspects do you think continue to inform your employment now?**
Music Industry Studies is a standalone third year course which outlines the skills and knowledge required to establish and operate a small business in the DIY environment and as with the music history courses, is delivered in conventional lecture format. Content covers formal taxation, registration, planning, insurance and fiscal control protocols along with the various income streams possible. Effective techniques of self-management, live performance and touring are taught along with measures necessary to secure an independent release and a detailed study of the publicity, promotion and marketing of music products and services. It is assessed through a combination of research essay, business and marketing plan, and formal exam. As would be expected, due to the content of these classes, the answers were quite specifically hard skills directed, with responses such as learning how to set up a music business, understanding of IP and copyright, marketing and touring. However, soft skills were still identified despite the hard skills basis of the course content, and seven themes emerged from the coded responses:

- Specific music business knowledge
- Inspiration
- Self-confidence
- Understanding the market
- Networking
- Value of peers
- Portfolio careers

As in previous questions, these responses reflect a valuing of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills along with hard skills directly applicable to a musical livelihood.
Despite the distinctly different content, delivery modes, assessment and learning practices of these 4 suites of courses, consistency of responses to referring to related soft skills was clearly evident. A synthesis of these soft skills is discussed in the following section.

**Synthesis of Survey Responses**

Based on the responses to these four questions, I was able to identify three primary themes emerge as indicative skills identified by students as relevant to their current employment: Collaborative and Communicative skills; Creative skills; and Business and Industry skills. A sample of these, colour-coded for ease of grouping, is shown in the figure below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skillset</th>
<th>Major Study</th>
<th>Studio Stream</th>
<th>Music Analysis</th>
<th>Music Industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soft skills:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in self-expression</td>
<td>Communicate musical ideas</td>
<td>Written Expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with industry peers</td>
<td>Credibility amongst peers</td>
<td>Value of peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soft skills:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical listening</td>
<td>Critical listening and analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of creativity</td>
<td>Professional confidence</td>
<td>Cognitive thinking</td>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed study</td>
<td>Self-directed learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-based learning</td>
<td>Skills transferability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hard skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio careers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Portfolio careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge of jargon</td>
<td>Professional context</td>
<td>Specific music business knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Synthesised Coded Themes

Collaborative and Communicative interpersonal skills encompass competence in verbal and written expression and the ability to develop networks and collaborate with peers; Creative skills are cognitive intrapersonal skills which focus here on critical thinking and an entrepreneurial mindset. The hard skills demonstrated in the Business and Industry skills subset describe specific skills such as navigation of the music business, and ‘doing;’ skills such as session playing and arranging. Here we can see that, as indicated in the individual questions, graduates recognized, identified and valued soft skills as much as they did hard skills. This observation is tested in the final question:

Q5: Overall, name the five most important skillsets (hard or ‘soft’) that you gained from the degree that have influenced you the most.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft Skills</th>
<th>Hard Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication and feedback skills</td>
<td>Music technology skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Music industry knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Songwriting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>Musicianship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>Live performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visually, when all of the long responses were entered into a word cloud application, the prevalence of responses related to soft skills is evident:

![Word Cloud of Final Question Responses](image)

**Figure 3: Word Cloud of Final Question Responses**

**Discussion**

The majority of these words refer to soft skills and were consistently referred to as equal to, sometimes more important than, hard skills such as musical, technical and business knowledge. Andrea Creech (2014) describes the know-what, know-why, know-how and know-whom competencies which characterize the successful professional musician. Supporting the findings of the analysis of the graduate surveys discussed above, interviews with portfolio musicians conducted by Creech revealed a
valuing of ‘know what’ and ‘know how’ hard skills alongside ‘know why’ and ‘know whom’ interpersonal and intrapersonal soft skills. That the graduates of the survey conducted for this article consistently emphasised soft skills such as collaboration, critical listening and communication (for example) indicates that these latter two competencies are of critical importance to the degree and the success of its graduates.

Soft Skills and the Portfolio Musician

Creech refers to the ‘boundaryless career’ - ‘professional landscape marked by diversity’ (360), aligning with the portfolio career. Her interviews with portfolio musicians and music undergraduates revealed a sense of livelihood that extended beyond a conventional career, ‘demonstrated by a deep love and enjoyment of music’ (Creech, 2014, 360). In the era of the portfolio musician, where the actual form of a graduate musician’s future career is not a given, these soft skill sets are more important than ever because of their applicability to the music industry at large, and their transferability. When even students recognize this, it is a sure sign that these need to be embedded in and emphasized in our popular music programs to ensure optimum graduate success.

The prevalence of the portfolio career in musical livelihoods, and the rapidly changing nature of the music industry mean that ‘neither talent nor experience is sufficient to guarantee graduate employability’ (Ghazali and Bennett, 2017, 596). Musicians require diverse and agile skillsets so that they can create and sustain a musical livelihood (Bartleet et al., 2020d; López-Íñiguez and Bennett, 2020). Such skills include teaching, performance and presentation skills, small business management skills, entrepreneurship, determination, skill refinement while
undertaking other work, risk management, a pioneering attitude, ethical behaviour, and highly developed interpersonal and relationship skills (Blom and Encarnacao, 2012; Canham, 2016; López-Íñiguez and Bennett, 2020). Not only must musicians possess a range of musical and non-musical skills (Canham, 2016), they must be able to apply them to the varied situations they will encounter throughout their careers (López-Íñiguez and Bennett, 2020). Many of these skills were identified in the analysis of the graduate data; seven points stand out as having been identified by graduates as most important to their graduate success:

- Understanding the musical portfolio career
- Importance of current industry knowledge
- Communication skills
- Collaboration skills
- Networking skills
- Critical Listening
- Analytical skills

These can be further grouped into two soft skillsets of primary importance for musicians – entrepreneurship and networking.

*Entrepreneurship*

The rise of technology and other societal changes has seen a shift in the ways musicians generate money (Bartleet et al., 2020a). Musicians now find themselves juggling a range of creative and business activities to provide adequate income security (Bartleet et al., 2019). The need for musicians to engage in entrepreneurial
activities has largely resulted from precarious and decreasing creative incomes. Research from Throsby (2007) and Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) shows that ‘while most musicians still spend around half their time on their creative work, they earn less income from it – down from 43 to 29%’ (Bartleet et al., 2020b, 14). Therefore, it is critically important that musicians develop entrepreneurial skills (Bridgstock, 2013; Hennekam and Bennett, 2016).

Entrepreneurship in this context involves ‘the self-management of a career, venture start-up and management, and the ability to identify and make the most of new opportunities’ (Bartleet et al., 2020b, 20). Entrepreneurial skills are required in music for things such as production, distribution, concerts, merchandising, branding, rights management, and marketing (Tschmuck, 2016). The learned entrepreneurial skills described by the graduates in this survey are evident in a cluster which includes in the first instance an understanding of the portfolio career, and within that context, the importance of self-direction, project management, professional skills, industry knowledge, critical thinking, and skills transferability. In other words, graduates need a solid grounding in the hard skills required to ‘do the job’ but this needs to be managed and supported through an entrepreneurial approached derived from the soft skills set out in Table 5.

Networking

The contractual and casual nature of musicians’ employment, also referred to as the ‘gig economy,’ requires strong industry networks to ensure continual and sufficient employment (Bennett and Burnard, 2016; Ghazali and Bennett, 2017). Peer networks are ‘a vital factor in how Australian musicians develop and maintain their portfolio
careers’ (Bartleet et al., 2020d, 4). Moreover, ‘musicians recognise the crucial role that peer networks play in developing their creative practices, sustaining their livelihoods, and nurturing the sector’ (Bartleet et al., 2020d, 4). Emily Smart, a South Australian singer-songwriter interviewed as part of the Making Music Work project explained that

“Without connections you’re on your own…. If you’re not actively getting involved with the industry, or getting out there and talking to people, then most people won’t know about what you do or how you do it, and it’s less likely that you’re going to get the opportunities that you need to help you generate more work and sustain what you’re doing.” (Bartleet et al., 2020c, 5)

it is essential that students develop networking skills and understand the importance of these relationships for career development. (Author A and Author, 2015; López-Íñiguez and Bennett, 2020). The interpersonal skillset outlined in Table 5 is dominated by references to networking and collaboration, and it is clear that the graduates understand its value and importance. However, networking is a skill that is not always inherent – embedding it in a peer-directed and collaborative learning environment across 3 years of study ensures a steady and non-threatening engagement with and development of these capacities. The final question then remains: how can these soft skills be embedded in higher music education?

Soft Skills in Higher Music Education
Slaughter (2008) and Ferguson (2010) urge tertiary educators to be mindful of future world challenges and prepare their graduates to deal with the unpredictable and discontinuous world that lies ahead. Increasing the time and resources allocated to developing students’ soft skills, creates an opportunity for academics to ‘enable and encourage the learner to enrich their development in a broad range of professional, charitable, voluntary, or leisure interests beyond academia’ (Ferguson, 2010, 61).

The distinct need for the popular music graduates to acquire soft skills during their degree becomes evident through studies such as that conducted for this article. The nature of a portfolio career means that these musicians will work in a ‘highly diversified way, in which they balance multiple concurrent roles, face non-linear career progression, take on higher levels of risk than workers who engage in full-time work and require an entrepreneurial mind-set to negotiate a highly competitive market (Bartleet et al., 2019, 285). This requires high level interpersonal and intrapersonal skills which facilitate the navigation of these complex pathways, and the characteristics of a musician’s career discussed above highlight the need for universities to adequately prepare their graduates for a diverse and non-linear career. Bartleet et al. (2019) explain that ‘there is now sufficient evidence on the characteristics of musicians’ careers to confirm that higher music education must rethink its mission’ (p.289). Moreover, research indicates that many students do not graduate with the skills needed to navigate the aforementioned career challenges, highlighting that universities must do more to prepare students for these realities. (Bartleet et al., 2020d; Ghazali and Bennett, 2017; López-Íñiguez and Bennett, 2020)
While recent research has focused on the necessary soft skills required for graduates, less data has been gathered with regard to how and why students and graduates value this teaching, and the research conducted for the purpose of this article has attempted to address this to some extent. The available literature, however, does indicate that graduates themselves do recognise the importance of soft skills to their careers and this is supported by the survey data explored in this article. Ghazali and Bennett (2017) found that music professionals advocate strongly that soft skills should be a core focus of higher music education with participants mentioning the importance of diligence, confidence, courage, adaptability, interpersonal skills, work ethic, problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills. The participants ‘emphasized that soft skills should be developed and applied in industry as early as possible during university studies’ because these ‘were critical in boosting their employability’ (Bennett, 2017, 597).

To achieve this, universities must consider ‘how portfolio careers operate’ and have ‘a nuanced understanding of the ever-changing music sector more broadly’ (Bartleet et al., 2019, 282). Skills relating to networking, business, marketing and education are essential and should be delivered with greater flexibility in degree structures (Bartleet et al., 2020b; Carey and Lebler, 2012; Lebler and Weston, 2015). In curriculum design, while we do of course plan for and provide education in specific hard skill sets (know how) this should not only be delivered incorporating essential soft skill sets, but knowledge of why these skills are important should be embedded in all aspects of the curriculum (know why). Ferguson (2010) and Bridgstock (2015) agree that soft skills cannot be taught in isolation. Ferguson (2010) believes that soft skills taught by universities should ‘reflect those identified by employers and other
stakeholders and reflect the interest in skills internationally’ (59) because this will ‘ensure that the divide between education and work may be narrowed’ (61). Similarly, Bridgstock (2015) advises to “make the learning activities as authentic as possible. This means that less translation is required between learning experience and work experience (para. 8).

Bridgstock (2015) explains that students must be taught ‘how the specific skills learned in one context can be translated for the specificities of a new context’ in what she calls ‘skills translation bridges’ (para. 8). It would appear that the graduates surveyed for this research indeed do understand the relevance of the soft skills acquired through their learning experience to those they will need to sustain their musical livelihoods, and without being explicitly taught how. This is because the structure and content of the program, along with its pedagogical framework, was designed specifically to mirror popular music industry culture and practice (Lebler, 2007). While the program has evolved over time in line with the industry – for example a shift in focus to live music after the advent of music streaming induced decline in income from recorded music – the emphasis on peer and self-directed learning has never wavered, as it remains an industry constant in its parallels of networking and entrepreneurship. The intrapersonal soft skills of critical thinking, listening, and reflection are embedded in every course in the degree that is the focus of this article, across all three years, in teaching and learning design and in assessment. This may take the form of contextual analysis, reflective journals, self and peer review of recorded material and the critical listening skills required of a self-directed learning environment with no ‘one to one’ musical tuition. Each semester, students assess and provide feedback on the creative work of their peers, embedding
professionalism, communication and collaborative skills. Students must instigate and manage their own creative projects (recorded folios) for their end of semester assessment, for which peer interaction, collaboration, and project-management come to the fore.

The rationale for the degree structure and content is reiterated at the start of each semester in a welcome lecture attended by students from all years, however is not explicit aside from this. The skills translation bridges are recognised by graduates, as shown by the survey, through the consistency with which they are embedded in the curriculum and their direct relevance to contemporary industry practice. That students recognise the relevance of these soft skills post-graduation is evidence of constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2011) wherein ‘learners use their own activity to construct their knowledge as interpreted through their own existing schemata’ (98). The collaborative learning environment of the degree, with its focus on peer-assessment and independent learning results in ‘key skills for the twenty-first century such as self-initiated and self-directed learning, lifelong learning, critical reflection and evaluation … which are particularly valuable in the entrepreneurial activities that characterize current professional music practice’ (Lebler, 2013, 111).

The age of the internet and subsequently social media has catalysed a profusion of entrepreneurially-minded musicians. Removed from the high-stakes capitalism of major record labels, many artists exploit and benefit from social media (Haynes and Marshall, 2017) and the general accessibility of Internet music platforms and distribution (Eiriz and Leite, 2017), sometimes sustaining no less fulfilling careers. Canham (2016) concludes that “maverick behaviours” – independence and
individualism – are a benefit to artists seeking a career, and that employability is often
treated inadequately in music education which focusses inordinately on conventional
pathways informed by the acquisition of ‘hard’ technical skills. The 21st century
musician needs to adapt to multiple, often sudden, changes in the industry, developing
new approaches, and new thinking along the way. The soft skills identified in this
research as essential through analysis of the survey data are the constant which helps
graduates to navigate these shifting sands. Embedding these skills in authentic
learning experiences, and weaving them throughout all elements of curriculum and
assessment ensures an almost seamless transition to the lived experience of music
professionals.
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