

Indie Industry

A GUIDE TO WORKING IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

You're set to leave school and are weighing up your career options. Your parents want you to get a trade and the government wants you to go into "cyber"... But what do you want? If you love music, like many of us do, and are interested in an exciting and opportunity-rich career in the industry, then read on...

THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF MUSIC

Pretty much everyone loves music. It's an artform as old as civilisation itself and has shaped cultures and societies around the world. It can be cathartic and inspiring as well as change perceptions and offer solace in times of need. It brings people together, gives identity and has recorded and left its marks on many significant events throughout history. It's not overstating things to say that music is essential to the evolution and progression of our species.

As a country we can't get enough of it. The UK listens to around 60 billion hours of music a year (the equivalent of 7 million years of music) and during lockdown around 1 million people took up a musical instrument to pass the time.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MUSIC

Despite its cultural significance people often dismiss music through economic means. You'll have no doubt heard someone say, "There's no money in music", which, if you look at the figures, just isn't the case.

The UK music industry contributed £3.1 Billion to the UK Economy in 2021 (£5.8 billion in 2019) and before the Covid-19 pandemic, UK music tourism contributed £4.7bn spend in the UK in 2019. Despite falling by 35% (from 197,000 in 2019) the industry still employed 128,000 in 2020. It's a viable career choice and, coming out of the pandemic, a growing industry with plenty of opportunities.

Sources: UK Music - Music by Numbers 2020 / This is music 2021

Music as a career

The industry encompasses a wide variety of professions including the more obvious roles such as musicians, promoters and sound technicians, as well as the music focused branches of professions you might not associate with the industry, such as lawyers, accountants and doctors.

Here are some careers within music that might be for you, alongside some practical advice on how to take your first steps to greatness...

MUSICIANS AND PERFORMERS

Those making and performing music are what the whole industry is based around. They range from artists who are selling out arenas and selling millions of records worldwide to performers doing shows in smaller venues and making a living from gig fees and merchandise. You don't have to be centre stage performers either, with musicians having successful careers in composing scores for TV and film, writing songs for other artists and being hired as a session musician for live and studio work.

GETTING STARTED...

LEARN AN INSTRUMENT

Borrow or purchase a second hand instrument, watch some YouTube tutorials and practice.

WRITE YOUR OWN SONGS/LYRICS

Reflect on your experiences, put something on paper and record it on your phone. Don't be too critical of what you've written, doing it is the important thing.

PLAY AN OPEN MIC/CIPHER

Take your work in progress and perform it. Use feedback to develop your work.

PROMOTER / EVENT STAFF

Promoters and event staff give artists a platform to showcase their work. They could be part of a music venue's in-house team or freelance and utilising a variety of venues to suit their needs.

Promoters are responsible for up and coming acts' first shows as well as putting on larger shows and festivals for more established acts. If you are well organised and dynamic, know what the audience want and are confident in your own curation, then music promotion might be right up your street.

The events staff allow the show to happen and have a wide range of roles from stage managing, to staffing the box office to serving drinks. They are hardworking innovators that are an essential part of any show.

GETTING STARTED...

PUT ON YOUR OWN GIG

Find a space (a front room, school hall, etc) and showcase your mates' musical talents.

SEE WHAT WORKS

Follow venues and promoters via their social media, read music press and get a feel for how they are telling the world about their events.

VOLUNTEER

Contact your local music venue, offer to help out at gigs to gain valuable experience and see how things work.

MANAGER / AGENT

Managers represent artists, putting plans in place to achieve success as well as dealing with the day to day tasks and engaging with the business side of things. They are responsible for the wellbeing of the act and negotiating deals that will further the careers of who they represent.

An agent gets gigs, organises tours and negotiates fees for performing. They build relationships with venues and promoters and act as their point of contact. They often work in collaboration with the manager.

GETTING STARTED...

GET SHOWS

Help your musical mates (or yourself if you are an artist) get shows at local venues.

KNOW THE INDUSTRY

Attend local music industry events, listen to podcasts and read music blogs to learn all you can.

NETWORK

Attend local shows, reach out to musicians and music professionals online and make your presence known.

LIVE SOUND ENGINEERS

A live sound engineer is responsible for the technical side of a recording or live performance. They manage sound levels and outputs, and are responsible for maintaining the physical sound equipment, like amps and microphones. They understand the acoustics of the venue they are in and can balance sound levels accordingly.

GETTING STARTED...

TRY IT YOURSELF

Get access to a vocal PA and ask an artist with minimal set up to perform. Play around with the settings and get yourself used to the desk.

WATCH THE EXPERTS

Shadow a sound engineer at your local music venue.

STUDY IT

Check out courses offered by local colleges that will give you all the tricks of the trade.

PRODUCER

A producer's role is to guide an artist through the recording process, helping them achieve their creative vision as well as making creative suggestions to help turn a great track into an absolute banger.

They take all the recorded parts of an artist's song, adjust the sound accordingly and weave them together to create a beautiful tapestry of sound. In genres such as hip-hop and dance, the producer creates the backing track for an artist to perform and often features in the track's title credits.

GETTING STARTED...

RECORD

Download some free software (Audacity, Garageband), record some sounds and experiment with the settings.

MIX IT UP

Record your friends performing using a phone or USB mic. Mix it and master it and ask for feedback.

BE INSPIRED

Watch YouTube/TikTok tutorials to pick up some production tips and get inspired.

VISUAL MEDIA MAKERS

Music is as much a visual medium as it is an aural one. With social media being such an important part of marketing music, having eye-catching artwork, music videos and gig photos will help you stand out in a saturated market. Creative talents such as graphic designers, photographers and videographers produce content that is often the first thing people will engage with when discovering an artist online.

GETTING STARTED...

TAKE SNAPS

Take pictures at gigs, play around with settings and filters and create an Instagram account to showcase work.

GET GRAPHIC

Utilise free and easy to use apps (Photoshop, Polish) and software (Vectr, Inkscape) to create artwork.

...AND ACTION!

Use apps (Inshot, Videoleap editor) or free software (iMovie, Lightworks) to make a music video to your favourite tracks.

PR AND PLUGGERS

Those working in Music PR (Public Relations) create promotional campaign strategies to generate interest in an artist's work, tours or activity from the public, media, and record companies. Through their contacts they are able to get the attention of broadcasters and journalists for beneficial coverage.

Similarly, a radio pluggger uses their connections with a radio station or presenter, to acquire radio airplay for an artist's music release.

GETTING STARTED...

ENGAGE

Follow your favourite music publications and radio stations via their social media and interact with their content.

WRITE

Practice your writing skills and put together a mock press release. Ask a magazine or PR company for feedback.

GET PRESS

Offer your musician mates your services in acquiring local press and radio play.

PUBLISHING

A music publisher licences the use of an artist's musical work for digital music platforms, TV shows, films and adverts and collects royalties on their behalf. They often help nurture musical talent whilst promoting their work.

GETTING STARTED...

REIMAGINE YOUR FAVE FILMS

Make a mood playlist of music you'd feel would work in your favourite film and TV shows.

WHO DOES WHAT?

Familiarise yourself with the role of copyright collective PRS and music publishers such as Sentric.

SOUNDTRACK

Ask film students if you could act as their music supervisor and suggest local musicians that might work with their projects.

PRESS + RADIO

Press and radio are essential in helping spread the word about artists and events and act as the mouthpiece for passionate music lovers.

Music magazines and blogs review artists' releases and live shows to help give audiences an impression of what they can expect. An artist's coverage can progress through this medium from becoming a couple of lines in a review to a front cover star.

Radio presenters can reach audiences via their radio sets and can introduce them to new music. They can also give the listener a greater insight into the artist by accompanying the track with additional information, alongside interviews and live sessions. A radio station's support can raise the profile of an artist and often is a key element of mainstream success.

GETTING STARTED...

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Get a Wordpress account and start blogging about the music you like.

BROADCAST

Use apps like Anchor and Podbean to easily create podcasts and radio shows.

SHOWCASE YOUR TALENTS

Create a portfolio/showreel of your work. Send examples to music magazines and radio stations.

RECORD LABEL

A record label provides a wide range of functions in the industry, including music marketing, publishing, distribution, copyright enforcement and of course spotting, signing and developing new music talent. Their goal is to make money from music and often have to adapt to the changing musical landscape to do so.

Major record labels are responsible for a high percentage of annual record sales and can do a majority of what they need to do to get music out there themselves. Independent record labels operate more within the grassroots music scenes, without funding from the majors and often work with third party companies to promote, distribute and publish music.

GETTING STARTED...

BRANDING

Think of a cool label name and design a logo.

TASTEMAKING

Create a monthly playlist on Spotify of your favourite tracks.

RELEASE

Establish your own digital label using distributors such as EMU Bands, DistroKid or Bandcamp. Release local artists you like under the umbrella of your label.

then what?

If you've enjoyed some of our suggestions on how to get started, then taking an educational route might give you the skills and knowhow to get on. Check out courses at your local colleges and university as well as apprenticeships and opportunities as part of funded programmes via venues and music organisations.

To help develop your work you might also consider applying for funding from various music and arts organisations. This will alleviate financial pressures, allow you to seek support to develop your skills to help further your career and attempt more ambitious projects.

CHECK OUT SOME USEFUL LINKS HERE...

