Developing
employ-ability

STUDENT RESOURCES

Conceptualising Careers

This resource uses the example of Jack, an aspiring pianist studying at the Royal College of Music in London.

The following snapshots come from interviews conducted with a student—Jack—during his three years at the Royal College of Music in London. Jack was interviewed every six months during his three-year program. In each snapshot, some of Jack's words have been highlighted as prompts for discussion.

Consider Jack's journey and write some notes on the following two questions.

1. What changes can you see over time?

2. What might have influenced these changes?

As you read, pause to answer the ? questions and insert statements which align with your own experience and thinking. For example, "My dream is to be a top physicist. I think I have to be realistic in that I will need to complete graduate study to make this happen. I would love to..."

Snapshot 1: End of first undergraduate year

VISION

'My dream thing would be being a piano soloist but I think I have to be realistic and while the piano is really tough, it becomes really hard so I don't know ... I would love to teach. I would really love to teach'.

? What does being realistic mean to you?

IDENTITY

'I don't know if the word exists—eclectic. I love contemporary music and chamber music and solo playing and academia and not only music academia. I don't throw myself in one direction, ignoring the others … I don't consider myself as a pianist. I think as a person I am a pianist but it is more a job thing. You are a pianist if you earn a living out of it and I don't do that so music student would describe me more correctly'.

? What do you think?
Should or does 'earning a living' determine how you describe yourself?

Snapshot 2: Beginning of second undergraduate year

VISION

'Hopefully I will have found my way into competitions so I can kind of be kind of recognised on the musical scale. If I haven't done well in any competitions, I haven't got much hope'.

? Is 'musical scale'—or where you fit among others—important to you?

IDENTITY

Jack: I feel like a music student and even though I have got this big thing which makes me the soloist with the orchestra, I still don't feel like I'm this [amazing] pianist! I just feel like myself, just a music student, in London. That's it.

? How does music fit in to how you see yourself?

Snapshot 3: Midway through second undergraduate year

VISION

'Happiness. Whatever I do I want to be happy—not rich. [Interviewer: Do you see music as being part of that?] Yes. I can't live without it—whether it is for me or sharing with pupils or an audience. I can't live without making music. [Interviewer: So do you think it will be the only thing you do professionally?] No. I know that I will also need something more intellectual. Music is very intellectual. I like making music but I also like pondering music and writing about it because they explain the feelings and what you feel when you listen to music'.

? How important do you think it is to think or ponder or write about music?

IDENTITY

'I would say musician rather than pianist but at the same time I would describe myself as open to broader horizons. I would not like to limit myself to musician'.

? Do you undertake activities outside of music?

? How do different things that you do connect together?

Developing Employability is led by
Professor Dawn Bennett, Bond University, Australia.
The work is supported by the Australian Government
Department of Education and Training.

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Snapshot 4: Beginning of third undergraduate year

VISION

'I want to try to be a better musician all the time. I want to never lose momentum—never lose motivation and I want to always strive never to become bitter because I have now worked hard enough to get where I want to get and I don't want to be in this two square meter little room all day and be thinking 'This isn't what I want to do'. I don't want to do that. If I am teaching, it is because I want to do that. If I am performing, it is because I want to'.

? What do you want to do with your time? How can you try to make this happen?

IDENTITY

'[I think you need to] bring everything together because music isn't one island. It is one piece and you have to know everything … the world of culture is fascinating and it is one thing that makes you think that I don't have to be wealthy. It is the one thing that makes me realise that I don't need that much money and [to] have a wonderful home in Kensington. It is the one thing that makes me feel that I am really rich'.

? How many different 'islands' can you think of to describe your musical activities? How do these all link together?

Snapshot 5: After graduation

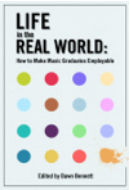
IDENTITY

Jack: I sometimes think that being versatile is not a strength at all. Perhaps people would like someone who is excellent at doing one thing and who devotes heart, soul and body to doing that one particular thing, which is not my conception of music for life. I am not the most gifted pianist. I haven't got the best technique in the world and I am not the best musician in the world either, but at least I am willing to improve, but I do realise how limited I can be.

Interviewer: And when you say your conception of a musician, what is that conception?

Jack: I don't know. It is just, I think … I think that 90% of the people who audition for here, within the four years they are all hoping to be the world's most recognised musician and that flakes off as we go along and at the end of the time that we are leaving the RCM or we are about to leave it, it has completely crumbled and you realise what you can do around that and that can make you happy. In my case, it is doing different things. It is just about sharing for me. I have realised that piano solos are just not for me and I just don't enjoy that any more. I just like sharing and making people know and learn what music is about. That is what matters to me.

? Finally, what really matters to you? In many ways, this should be at the heart of all of the decisions you take about your career.



This resource comes from Life in the Real World: How to Make Music Graduates Employable, published by Common Ground in 2012. Purchasers of the book are permitted to download all of the tools and resources.

If you have yet to purchase the book, please order it from here.

This resource was contributed by Rosie Perkins (Royal College of Music).
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