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## An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland

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**UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK**

**OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH**

**An Exploratory Study of the Career  
Development of Performing Arts  
Professionals in Ireland**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the Master  
of Arts in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan  
Development**

**October 16, 2018**

## **Declaration**

The author hereby declares that this thesis is entirely her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in University of Limerick, or in any other institution.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Majella Perry

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## List of Abbreviations

CV	Curriculum Vitae
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
IETM	The International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
NCFA	National Campaign for the Arts (Ireland)
UL	University of Limerick
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## Abstract

The overall aim of this research is to explore the experience of career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland, in particular theatre artists and musicians. The study deliberates on the challenges encountered as they strive to establish a creatively satisfying and economically sustainable career (Wyszominski and Chang 2017). Furthermore, it examines the types of career supports available and the contribution of postgraduate studies to their career development.

Artists frequently undertake short term, low security work contracts, requiring adaptability, flexibility and mobility (O'Brien Bernini 2016). Performance artists engage in the 'gig economy', doing sessional or temporary jobs, paid by different employers (Wyszominski and Chang 2017). Professional development opportunities are provided by the Arts Council of Ireland and other arts organisations (Arts Council 2017). However, these cater for only a small number of artists and access is frequently competitive. European initiatives such as Creative Europe also offer opportunities for artists to develop new skills, professionalise and internationalise their careers (Creative Europe 2018).

An interpretivist paradigm underpinned this research study which involved semi structured interviews and thematic analysis of the career narratives of six performing arts professionals (Braun and Clarke 2006). This research demonstrates that career development in the Irish arts sector is complex with performing arts professionals carving out individualized career paths, in what is commonly perceived to be an insecure and precarious profession. Tension exists between this reality and the fact that individuals feel drawn to this career path, with some viewing it as a 'vocation' and part of their self-identity. Also highlighted is the relational influence of parents, family and friends on their career decision making, and the significance of professional and personal networking. The findings also illustrate the benefits of this career type; opportunities for artistic freedom, personal satisfaction and self-fulfilment, meaning and value of work in their lives and diverse work opportunities.

However, this study exposes a gap in current research on the career development process and experience of performance artists in Ireland over a long-term period. Several recommendations are put forward to inform policy, practice and further research on this particular career area.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents this research study in the context of relevant theory, policy and practice. It provides a justification for the research and the positionality of the researcher within it. The chapter outlines the research methodology used and the aims and objectives of the research study. Finally, a plan of the thesis is presented.

## 1.1 Context and Justification for the Research Study

This research will explore the issue of the career development of performance artists, in particular theatre artists and musicians, in Ireland. There is a commonly held perception that careers in the arts, and particularly in performing arts are unstable, insecure and precarious (Beirne *et al.* 2017). Traditionally careers in the cultural sector have involved insecure employment practices (Nelson and Cote 2014). Artists frequently undertake short term, low security work contracts, requiring flexibility, mobility and adaptability (O'Brien Bernini 2016). Performing artists, regularly engage in the 'gig economy' by doing different gigs or temporary jobs, each paid separately by different employers (Wyszominski and Chang 2017). Consequently, artists find themselves claiming occupational status by connecting their work experiences and career goals while also coping with the "uncertain rhythms of precarious work" long-term (Morgan and Nelligan 2018, p.86). As a result of the global economic crisis, public funding for the arts in Ireland has been significantly hit over the past decade. Government support for the arts and artists provided through the Arts Council of Ireland was reduced by 29% between 2007 and 2015 (Ireland, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2015). This contraction in arts funding has directly impacted artists and the available work within the sector. The recently announced budget 2019 figures, see the Arts Council funding increase by 10% on 2018 figures, to €75 million, falling short of the peak of €84 million in 2007 (Ireland, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018). Furthermore, the Government has committed to double funding to the arts sector by 2025 (Ireland, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018).

According to the Arts Council's ten-year strategy, its role is to support the professional development of artists and arts professionals over the lifespan to ensure they 'are supported at key stages in the lifecycle of their careers' (Arts Council 2017, p.18). Currently, in Ireland, opportunities for professional development, mentoring, support and training in Ireland are offered by a broad range of arts providers, such as arts organisations, local authority arts offices, festivals and resource organisations. These include Theatre Forum Ireland, Irish Theatre Institute, Dance Ireland, Druid Theatre, CREATE (the national development agency for collaborative arts). However, these initiatives are small scale, tend to be art form specific, and cater for only a small number of artists annually. Thus, accessing many professional development opportunities is a competitive process. Equally, opportunities for professional development exist within a European context such as Erasmus +, and the Creative Europe initiative. Creative Europe has designated the upskilling and sustainability of artist careers as one of its strategic priorities.

The career progression routes within performance arts are not always straightforward or easy to navigate and career success can be difficult to measure at times. Contemporary career development theorists such as Savickas' career construction theory (2005) addresses issues such as career meaning and career adaptability which can help individuals cope with the challenges of unstable professions, such as exist within the arts sector (Savickas 2011b). Briscoe and Hall's protean career theory (Briscoe and Hall 2006) sees career being managed by the individual rather than the organisation, based upon personal goals rather than organisational objectives. Such an approach sees the career author take responsibility for their own career direction. The flexibility and adaptability that many artists' careers require, reflects Inkson's 'boundaryless career' construct, where responding to changing environments is key. This study is concerned with performance artists, more specifically those in theatre and music, who have completed post graduate studies in Ireland. It aims to illuminate the career development process within this career area, and to explore the personal and professional resources that such individuals draw upon to build and sustain their careers over time. It will illuminate the nature of artist careers, the challenges and benefits, and the fact that, despite the obstacles, artists feel drawn to their artistic career and craft, much like a 'vocation' (Arts Council 2010a, p.14).

The limited and dated research available in Ireland on the living and working conditions of performance artists inhibits our understanding of career opportunities and pathways in this profession. It is expected that this study will contribute to an increased understanding of this career area and that it will stimulate further scholarly discourse on performance artists' careers and livelihoods.

## **1.2 Researchers Position in the Study**

In interpretivist research, stating the positionality of the researcher is extremely important (Thomas 2013). In this study it is important for the researcher to acknowledge her own position and assumptions on the topic, as well as her role in the research process (Cohen *et al.* 2007). The researcher is not detached from this subject area as she has direct experience of forging a professional career in the arts herself. The researcher has worked in the not for profit sector throughout her career, in the arts, community development, youth work and in education. She has worked full time in various roles within organisations, and has primarily worked freelance over the past 20 years. Her art form training is in theatre, and her arts work has been mainly as a theatre maker, trainer and facilitator rather than as a performer. Consequently, she has some familiarity with the discourse within the sector and is sensitized to the research issue (McLeod 2015).

The researcher was aware of her positionality within the research and the effect this may have on her interpretation of the findings (Berger 2015). Researcher reflexivity became a key aspect of this study to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the research (McLeod 2015). Professional supervision supported a process of continuous critical self-evaluation to address biases and assumptions throughout the research process (Berger 2015).

## **1.3 Aims and Objectives**

The overarching aim of this study is to explore the topic of developing a career in the performing arts in Ireland. The research objectives are:

1. To examine relevant literature related to policy, theory and practice on the topic of career development in performance arts.
2. To gain an understanding of the experience of career development in the performing arts sector through the narratives of individuals working in the performing arts sector.
3. To analyse the findings and provide new insights into this under researched area in the performing arts sector.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology**

This research utilized a qualitative research approach underpinned by an interpretive paradigm. The study sought to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of performance artists in Ireland (Thomas 2013). In this study, a series of six individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted during 2018, to gather detailed accounts of the multiple realities and the complexities of performing artists careers (Punch 2014). The interviews were transcribed and a thematic analysis strategy was used to produce the primary research findings (Braun and Clark 2006)). Critical issues such as validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethics were considered throughout the research process (Thomas 2013).

#### **1.5 Outline of the Thesis**

**Chapter 1:** The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the research topic, the justification for this research, the researcher's positionality, aims and objectives, and methodology of the study. It also presents an overview of the six chapters.

**Chapter 2:** This chapter critically examines literature on governmental policy and funding of the arts sector in Ireland. Literature on professional development opportunities nationally and internationally are scrutinised as well as theoretical perspectives on career development and decision-making in the performing arts sector.

**Chapter 3:** This chapter outlines the research approach and paradigm underpinning this study. It identifies the primary and secondary questions and the data collection and analysis methods. It also addresses issues of validity, reliability, ethics and researcher reflexivity.

**Chapter 4:** This chapter discusses the analytical strategy used to examine the primary data and the research findings that emerged. These findings are presented under the themes that emerged from the data.

**Chapter 5:** This chapter provides a synthesis and critical interpretation of the core findings and literature in the context of the research questions of the study.

**Chapter 6:** This final chapter provides the general conclusions of the study in the context of the aim and objectives of this research study. The strengths and limitations are analysed. It highlights recommendations for policy, practice and research and reflects on the researchers' personal learning gained.

## **Chapter 2      Literature Review**

### **2.0      Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to critically review the literature related to career development in the performing arts in Ireland. This investigation examines literature related to governmental policy and State funding of the arts in Ireland, cultivating a career in the creative arts, and finally, an examination of career development theory relevant to this career area. In conducting this literature review, relevant research material was sourced from primary texts, policy documents, journals, databases and practice-based articles (Hart 1998).

The chapter is divided into two thematic sections. The first section examines the historical and policy context of State support for the arts in Ireland as well as funding available to the arts and to artists. The second section examines the realities of developing a career in the performing arts and highlights some of the issues inherent to this career area. Additionally, career development and decision-making theories relevant to creative arts careers are examined. This review has found a lack of notable research in Ireland on the living and working conditions of performing artists, the most recent being in 2010 (Arts Council 2010a).

### **2.1      Arts, Culture and Performing Arts**

This section will examine contemporary definitions and descriptions of performing arts, the historical developmental of State support to the arts, the current policy context and finally, State and European funding available to artists.

#### **2.1.1    Definitions**

The term *arts and culture sector* broadly describes a vibrant and diverse range of “organisations, activities, projects and initiatives in the field of arts and culture in a particular country” (Varbanova 2013, p.1). Kogan (2002) extended the categorizing of performing arts to include singers (musicians, singers, dancers and actors). The arts are

generally viewed as a "set of activities involving human creativity, divided into various disciplines including visual arts, music, literature, and dance" (Rosewall 2014, p.2). In recent years, the definition of the arts has broadened from what was traditionally considered *high art* (opera, sculpture, theatre, symphony) to embrace more participatory and widely popular forms, such as film and musical theatre (Rosewall 2014). The definition of performing arts offered by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2018) gives a broader view of performing arts as ranging from vocal and instrumental music, dance and theatre to pantomime, sung verse and beyond.

The arts are an important part of our everyday lives as people may choose to listen to music whilst walking, read a book on the train, attend a gallery opening after work, choose a print for their home or take their children to music classes (Rosewall 2014). However, the significance of the arts extends beyond "the pleasure they arouse or interest they stimulate" (Lunn and Kelly 2008, p.15). Artistic endeavour may be viewed as a fundamental human activity common to all our cultures (Lunn and Kelly 2008).

Audiences for the arts in Ireland are increasing. The Arts Council market research study (2015) into adult population interactions with the arts showed that 64% of the adult population indicated that they attended at least one arts-related event in the previous 12 months (Arts Council 2016), an increase of 8% on 2013 figures. This figure compares favourably with annual attendance figures from Northern Ireland (47%) and Great Britain (45%) (Arts Council, 2016).

### **2.1.2 Governmental Policy in Relation to the Arts in Ireland**

State support for the arts in Ireland is a relatively recent development. In 1951, state funding was formalised through the establishment of the Arts Council of Ireland, under the Government of Ireland Arts Act (Arts Act 1951) charging it with three key responsibilities: stimulating public interest, promoting knowledge, appreciation and practice, and assisting in improving standards in the arts (Arts Council 2017). This was the first direct action by the Irish Government to formally support arts and cultural development in Ireland. The six

core functions of the Arts Council, set out in the Arts Act 1951, continue to guide the work of the Arts Council today. The Arts Act 1951 has been superseded by the Arts Act 1973 (Arts Act 1973) and the current Arts Act 2003 (Arts Act 2003). The 2003 Arts Act reiterated the three key purposes of the Arts Council and re-calibrated the relationship between it and Government as an autonomous expert body for "funding and promoting the arts, steering their development, and offering advice on arts and cultural matters" (Arts Council 2017, p.44). In 1993, the establishment of the Department of Arts, Culture and The Gaeltacht was a significant step in bringing the 'state apparatus for cultural support under the aegis of one body and also most importantly, gave the sector full ministerial representation' (Fitzgibbon 2015).

The Arts Council produced the first Arts Plan in 1995. A mid-term review of this plan (Arts Council 1997), gives an insight into the landscape of arts development in Ireland at that time, stating that access to professional training and opportunities for employment in some art forms is relatively recent (Arts Council 1997). Since this first Arts Plan in 1995, the Arts Council has produced six Strategic Plans. The most recent is a 10-year long-term strategy for the development of the arts in Ireland - *Making Great Art Work 2016-2025* (Arts Council 2017). Within each Arts Plan, there is reference to the professional development of artists as an objective or a strategic goal. The prioritization of this goal appears to have increased over time to the current position where artists are identified as one of two key policy areas and the plan articulates specific objectives, measures of success and supporting activities (Arts Council 2017).

The most recent governmental policy development relating to the arts in Ireland is the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022 (Creative Ireland 2018). This new, all of government initiative is aimed at nurturing and celebrating creativity and culture in Ireland, and is administered through the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2015). It aims to place creativity at the centre of public policy and to bring "co-ordination and focus to existing culture-based policy and initiatives" (Ireland, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2015, p.8). Creative Ireland recognises culture and creativity as 'assets of any society' stating further that 'promoting creativity provides us with a strategy for individual wellbeing, social cohesion and economic success' (ibid, p.5). This strategy

recognises the intrinsic value of arts and culture to the individual, as well as to society, and the potential of the arts to drive economic success and societal wellbeing.

However, there is a danger when arts funding is ‘used’ in this way to achieve social and economic outcomes which are not necessarily connected with the arts practice itself (Caust 2017; Gray 2008). The risk is that artists and arts organisations will be required to adjust their activities to support the attainment of the funder’s goals as opposed to the aesthetic and artistic value of *art for art’s sake* (Caust 2017; Chatzichristodolou 2013). The National Campaign for the Arts (NCFA), a grassroots movement that advocates for the arts in Ireland, while positive about this initiative, has also expressed concerns about its focus on publicity and marketing over long-term sustainable change and investment (NCFA 2017).

Creative Europe, is the EU’s main funding programme, supporting Europe’s cultural and creative sectors (Creative Europe 2018). Arising from the Europe 2020 strategy, Creative Europe has identified capacity building in the sector as one of the key priorities for funding. This includes initiatives or opportunities for artists and other cultural professionals to develop new skills, professionalise and internationalise their careers (Creative Europe 2018). This may occur through informal learning opportunities, workshops, master-classes, peer learning networks, mentoring, artist exchanges and residencies (Creative Europe 2018).

### **2.1.3 Arts Funding for Artists**

In line with events in Europe, due to the global economic recession, "state funding for the arts has shrunk significantly since 2008" (Bell 2015, p.6). To put this in context, in 2007, Arts Council funding reached a peak of €83 million. In 2015, this was reduced to €58.9 million, a drop of 29% (Ireland, Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2015). This reduction was as a result of the Irish economic crisis and the severe and sudden contraction in public investment in the arts (Arts Council 2013). In 2008, 340 arts organisations were in receipt of Arts Council funding and by 2017 this had reduced to 240 (Arts Council 2017). In effect, more than 100 organisations lost their funding and individual artists and groups could not access support (Arts Council 2017). The 2018 budget allocation to the Arts Council of €68 million represents an increase of just 5% on 2017 figures. In a year (2017) when the Government raised hopes within the sector by

stating its commitment to "double funding to the arts and culture sector by 2024" (Arts Council 2017) this €3 million increase fell short of expectations (Linehan 2017). However, the recently announced budget 2019 figures, sees that number increase further to €75 million which is a positive development (Ireland, Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018). Ireland has a particularly long way to travel to align itself with other European countries (Bell 2015). In 2013, EU average GDP spending on the arts and culture stood at 0.6%. Ireland's public spending for arts and culture represents 0.11% of GDP placing Ireland far below the European average and at the bottom the European league table (Council of Europe 2017).

Public grant funding of the arts has never been sufficient to reach all artists or provide a reliable source of income (Wyszominski and Chang 2017). Most companies and artists working in the performing arts in Ireland do not receive regular funding and most of those who do are on annual funding arrangements (Bell 2015). The Arts Council, as the main conduit for funding of the arts in Ireland, provides a range of funding supports to artists both directly and indirectly. It does this directly through bursaries, awards, residencies and commissions, and indirectly, through funding of arts organisations (Arts Council 2017). However, the 'unhealthy' (p.5) over-reliance on the Arts Council as a funding source by the arts sector was expressed as early as 2002 (Arts Council 2002).

The Arts Council itself is not in receipt of multi-annual funding. Consequently, this funding uncertainty carries through for artists and arts organisations, impacting future planning and delivery (Bell 2015). Research commissioned by the Arts Council (2010a) found that an average of about 10% of artists' income comes from the Arts Council, and almost three out of five artists (56%) said that this funding is important in supporting their work as artists. Although this research is dated it represents the most recent study into the living and working conditions of artists in Ireland and gives an indication of the importance of, and potentially over reliance on, Arts Council funding to artists and the direct effect of budgetary changes on their livelihoods.

In 2017, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, announced a pilot initiative to allow practicing artists access to social welfare supports (Ireland, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection 2017). This pilot initiative, which is a key commitment under the Creative Ireland Programme, is available to writers and visual artists alone. It aims to provide flexibility within the system to allow artists access social welfare supports when they need them (Ireland, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection 2017). While this pilot initiative is a positive development for some artists, it prioritizes visual and literary artists over performing artists such as actors, musicians, dancers.

## **2.2 Career Development in the Performing Arts Sector**

This section will address the literature on career (i) career precarity in the performing arts and, (ii) professional supports for artists and (iii) theoretical perspectives on career development and decision-making relevant to this career type.

### **2.2.1 Career Precarity in the Performing Arts**

There is a commonly held perception that careers in the arts are unstable, insecure and precarious with many artists supporting their creative practice by working outside the sector (Beirne *et al.* 2017). According to Neilson and Cote (2014), precarity is a concept that describes ‘experiences of risk and uncertainty associated with insecure patterns of employment’ (p.3). Traditionally careers in the cultural sector have involved insecure employment practices (Neilson and Coté 2014). Often, artists are crafting

portfolios of jobs that enable them to harness their creativity and earn a living, working in non-profits, commercial enterprises, in their own business or working for free.

(Lingo and Tepper 2013, p.342)

This issue is explicitly acknowledged in the current Arts Council Strategic Plan where "the generally low level of remuneration of many artists constitutes a significant hidden subsidy of the arts" (Arts Council 2017 p.18).

The Arts Council first commissioned research on the living and working conditions of artists in 1980 (Arts Council 1980). Twenty-five years later, in 2005, it commissioned a

study into the socio-economic conditions of theatre practitioners (Hibernian Consulting 2005). This 2005 study aimed to contribute to "public recognition and understanding of the unique working lives of some of our most visible artists" (Hibernian Consulting 2005, p.7). One outcome of this research was that despite the challenges and difficulties associated with a career in theatre, eight out of ten respondents would choose to work in theatre if starting out on their career again (Hibernian Consulting 2005). The common view expressed was that this profession is likened to a 'vocation' where the artists could not see themselves doing anything else (Hibernian Consulting 2005, p.18). This is confirmed in further research conducted by the Arts Council in 2010 into the living and working conditions of artists (Arts Council 2010a). In this research four out of five artists surveyed on their living and working conditions articulated they would still choose to work as an artist if they were starting over. Study respondents identified a number of contributing factors including "the nature of their work as artists, they feel a drawn to it as a 'vocation', and their work as artists provides personal as well as career fulfilment (Arts Council 2010a, p.14).

The Arts Council 2010 research (Arts Council 2010a) of 1,128 artists across a range of art forms, supported by the Arts Councils on both sides of the border, gives a very detailed insight into the living and working conditions of professional artists. The research revealed that the "majority are not employed full-time in their artistic profession, and encounter variable, fragmented and often unpredictable employment patterns" (Arts Council 2010a, p.25). Artists experience gaps of unpaid time between project funding which makes it difficult to support themselves financially and to maintain artistic momentum (Bell 2015). Frequently artists, and particularly performers, find it necessary to combine their artistic activity with another profession, not necessarily in the arts sector, in order to survive (Magkou 2017). This especially affects dancers who often see their work opportunities "shrinking from a fairly young age due to the relatively short-lived and physically demanding nature of careers in dance" (ibid, p.24).

Beirne *et al.* (2017) in an ethnographic study of 18 community artists in Northern Ireland identifies that although artist working conditions and processes are more 'precarious', few have given up altogether and had found ways to "stand on their own artistic ground" (p.21). This has resulted in artists employing career development strategies such as

professional and personal networking, taking advantage of social media platforms, extending their skill competency and working in non-traditional arts settings such as education and health (Beirne *et al.* 2017). Networks are crucial to an artist's career, be they internal networks within the cultural sector, or external networks such as education, youth work and community development (Atlas *et al.* 2003). Research conducted by Atlas *et al.* (2003) into the support structure for artists in the United States, found that networks can offer sources of artistic validation, professional development, training and information sharing. Artists frequently rely on personal networks such as family, friends and social organisations for space, access to audiences, work opportunities and at times financial subsidy (Atlas *et al.* 2003).

### **2.2.2 Professional Supports for Artists**

Within Europe, there are a number of initiatives that offer professional development opportunities to performance artists. The Creative Europe initiative, the EU's main funding programme for the culture sector, has identified the upskilling of artists and the sustainability of artists careers as a strategic priority (Creative Europe 2018). A number of Irish companies and arts organisations are national partners in some of these Creative Europe funded projects such as The Ark (PUSH 2018), Fidget Feet, and Dance Limerick, to name just a few. Career development may not be the primary purpose of these projects but it is an element within them. Equally, Erasmus + (Erasmus + 2018), the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport is frequently availed of by artists - Galway Community Circus for example (Galway Community Circus 2018), for professional training and development. On the Move (2018), a European initiative, provides information support to artists on various career development and training opportunities in the EU and further afield. Equally, the international network for contemporary performing arts (IETM), aims to "empower performing arts professionals through access to international connections, knowledge and a dynamic forum for exchange" (ITEM 2018). In a recent publication, (Magkou 2017), it provides information resources to performance artists to navigate the sector's challenges, including career transition. Interestingly, some countries have national structures that may be of support to artists considering a career transition. InterMezzo in Flanders (Belgium) offers career guidance to performing artists on various areas including advice for those wishing to orientate themselves to other jobs or sectors (Magkou 2017). The researcher found that

career development opportunities for artists in Ireland tend to be offered on an art form specific basis and generally focus on practice and career development within that discipline. The researcher could find no specific professional development supports in Ireland for artists transitioning out of their performing arts career into other areas of work.

In its 2010 document, *Supporting the Production and Presentation of Theatre, A New Approach* (2010b), the Arts Council specifically identifies the need for organisations in receipt of core funding to "offer a range of training/mentoring, development and production opportunities for individuals and artists" (p.7). Within the Arts Council's current strategic plan, it identifies for itself, a role in supporting the professional development of artists and arts professionals, to "ensure artists are supported at key stages in the lifecycle of their careers" (Arts Council 2017, p.18). In recent years, the Arts Council has made funding available to arts organisations to offer dedicated professional development initiatives for artists (Bell 2015). The researcher, in examining these professional development and mentoring opportunities, found that they are provided by a wide range of arts organisations and providers, including art form specific resource organisations, local authority arts offices, arts centres and festivals (Irish Theatre Institute, Druid Theatre, CREATE, Dance Ireland and others). All of these initiatives offer different types of supports to artists (Bell 2015). While this provision is important, frequently these providers can only cater for a very small number of artists annually. Consequently, there is a risk that such opportunities will be disjointed and fragmented and access to them, overly competitive.

Professional training and education in the performing arts has advanced in recent years, with existing undergraduate and postgraduate courses growing in profile and new opportunities becoming available (Bell 2015). The Lir Academy of Dramatic Art offers undergraduate and post graduate courses as well as HE institutions such as NUI Galway, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin Institute of Technology, and Irish World Academy at the University of Limerick (Bell 2015). The Arts Council's study (Arts Council 2010a) identified that 86% of professional artists in Ireland have a third-level qualification of some kind with 39% having a postgraduate or professional qualification. Furthermore, seven out of ten artists had undertaken specific academic or formal training in relation to

their work as artists, with one in four having undertaken private training (Arts Council 2010a). Opportunities to avail of continuing professional development (CPD) were also cited as being important to artists. Over half of the ROI artists (n865) had undertaken CPD in the previous year. Of all art form groups surveyed, those artists in the performing arts and film were most likely to believe that there are insufficient opportunities for continuing education, training and development (Arts Council, 2010a). This confirms the findings of 2005 research with theatre practitioners, which found 78% of respondents' felt that professional development and training opportunities for theatre artists were insufficient (Hibernian Consulting 2005). In a similar survey in Finland in 2010, statistics showed that 81% of artists hold a degree in their art form, lower than in Ireland (86%), and 49% had completed the highest level of professional training in their field (Arts Promotion Centre Finland 2010).

### **2.2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Career Development**

Theories of career development began to emerge in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Patton and McMahon 2014). At that time, career was viewed in a linear way, as a fit between an individual's traits and the needs of the work environment (Kidd 2006). Frank Parson's (1909) differential construct remained the primary theoretical approach and evolved to Holland's (1997) 'congruence theory of vocational choice' (Savickas 2011b, p.4). Holland's theory of person-environment fit (differential) identifies six personality types and matches the individuals "personal traits to the kind of work that best utilizes those traits" (Inkson *et al.* 2015, p17). Holland's theory centres on the fact that that most individuals generally fit into one of six personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional (Sharf 2010). This model explicitly identifies 'artistic' as one of the six types. The types of work activities and environments relevant to this personality type are reflective of much of the research presented earlier, "creating artwork or performing, working independently, unstructured, flexible environments that allow self-expression" (Swanson and Fouad 2010, p.107). However, Holland's approach does not take account of the changing nature of work and work place environments, the external economic environment as well as an individual's own personal decision-making process (Kidd 2006). The unpredictability of life experience also influences career paths. Morrison 1994 (cited in Bright and Pryor 2005) found that a group of people who shared

similar codes, as in traits identified by Holland, diverged in their career path over time in ways that were not predictable from the original descriptions of their Holland types.

The developmental approach to career development emerged in the 1950's through the work of Ginzberg (1951) and Super (1957). Super's Life Span Theory (1957) viewed vocational development as a process of decision making across the life-span, embracing the varied roles and stages of an individual's life (Swanson and Fouad 2010). Gottfredson (1996), also a developmental theorist, is "concerned with both the content of career aspirations and their course of development" (p.181). This theory of circumscription and compromise explores how individuals may make compromises in relation to their career decisions and circumscribe, eliminating options too early (Patton and McMahon 2014). Various factors may influence and limit the choices an individual makes at different life stages such as the types of career opportunities available at the time, the limitations of the labour market, their personal circumstances and others. In the case of actors, for example, their career is often marked by significant instability and rejection (Kogan 2002).

Over time a more non-linear view of careers has emerged which reflects and addresses the realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century career development, including the implications of "complexity, chance and change" for clients (Bright and Pryor 2005 p.293). Chance events often have a significant influence on an individual's career (Bright and Pryor 2005; Mitchell and Krumboltz 2009). Krumboltz' (1996) earlier social learning theory of career development suggests that individuals learn about themselves, their preferences and the world of work through direct and indirect experiences (Patton and McMahon 2014). Krumboltz (2009) further developed this approach to the happenstance learning theory of career counselling which helps clients integrate chance events into their career story. The Chaos Theory of careers, advanced by Bright and Pryor (2005) views career behaviour within the reality of an individual's experience which is "richly complex, nonlinear and serendipitous" (p.302). These two theoretical perspectives, Happenstance and Chaos, are of relevance to those working in the performing arts where the ability to recognise, respond and capitalize on career opportunities and chance events are important (Bright and Pryor, 2005; Krumboltz 2009). This view of career may be more in line with the nature of careers in the arts and

remove any self-imposed pressure to view and assess their career choices and decisions in a rational logical way (Bright and Pryor 2005).

Inkson's (2008) theory of the 'boundaryless career' and the protean career advanced by Briscoe and Hall (2006) also offer a helpful framework when examining the career development of arts professionals. Inkson (2008) refers to a 'boundaryless career' or 'boundary-crossing career' arguing that such an approach to career encourages flexibility, mobility, responsiveness to changing environments and taking of responsibility for one's own career. Equally, a protean career is directed by the individual based upon personal goals and is managed "by the person, not the organisation" (Briscoe and Hall 2006, p.6). However, when looking at the work life of artists, the circumstances of their employment may arise not alone from a desire to have a portfolio type career, but rather to 'supplement and stabilize' their incomes due to a lack of work as artists (Arts Council 2010a, p.8). Performing artists frequently engage in the 'gig economy' by doing different gigs or temporary jobs, each paid separately by different employers (Wyszominski and Chang 2017).

Savickas's (2011b) constructivist approach advocates viewing career, less as *developing* a career but rather *managing* a career in a fluid environment. He argues that career progression requires a shift from making plans to looking for possibilities and requires a level of adaptability and career fluidity in response to what is happening at a particular time (Savickas, 2011b). However, not all performance artists may be equipped with the personal skills and "adaptive coping strategies" (Kogan 2002, p.15) required to grow a successful career and maintain the career over the lifespan. They may find it difficult to cope with the stresses of rejection or failure, long spells away from home touring or indeed, his/her personal circumstances may not accommodate the level of adaptability and flexibility a successful career requires (Kogan 2002).

The crossing or blurring of boundaries is not unfamiliar to many artists who frequently work across disciplines or in multidisciplinary collaborations (Wyszominski and Chang 2017). Arts professionals frequently find themselves navigating a career pathway across

boundaries of discipline (art form), role (artist, facilitator, teacher, performer, director) and in more recent years, across creative environments and the context within which the work takes place (Mainemelis *et al.* 2016). It is commonplace in Ireland to find artists working in what are traditionally ‘non-arts’ settings such as education, health environments, youth work, prison service and others (Arts Council 2015). In such cases, artists must develop the skills and competencies to transition and shift between roles as performers and creators of art to facilitators of artistic experiences (Bridgestock 2005). This requires creativity, flexibility and mobility due to the project-based nature of the work, creative collaborations with other professionals, the nature of the creative process and "the artist's own needs for personal renewal" (Mainemelis *et al.* 2016, p.264).

### **2.3 Conclusion**

This literature review has critically examined current policy, research, theory and practice relating to the career development of professional performing artists, which is the focus of this study. A number of key issues arose which relate to the value placed on the arts politically and socially in Ireland. Issues relating to funding emerged, as well as particular difficulties faced by performing artists in cultivating a career in an unstable and insecure work environment. This review identifies that research on the career development of performance artists, particularly in Ireland, is very limited and much of it is outdated. This study identifies the need for further scholarship into this career area, particularly with regards to the supports needed by performing artists transitioning through various career stages. This study aims to deepen the knowledge and understanding of this under-researched area. The next Chapter will address the methodology employed in this study.

## **Chapter 3      Methodology**

### **3.0      Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the research approach and paradigm underpinning this study. It will identify the primary and secondary research questions and it will discuss the methodologies used for data collection and analysis. Furthermore, it will discuss issues of validity, reliability, ethical practice and researcher reflexivity.

### **3.1      Research Questions of Study**

This study has focused on the experiences of performing arts professionals in Ireland who are carving out a career in the areas of theatre and music. Furthermore, the influence of post graduate studies on participant's perception of their career opportunities and progression were also relevant in the study.

Thomas (2013) states that the shaping of ideas into a more specific question or set of questions lays at the heart of research. He argues that any research concerned with people and how they behave, must be concerned not alone with what questions are asked, but the nature of those questions (Thomas 2013). The research questions underpinning this study were informed by the analysis of the literature in Chapter 2, and by the researcher's professional experience in the arts sector.

#### **3.1.1      Primary Research Question**

The primary research question of the study asked:

*What is the experience of performing arts professionals in developing and sustaining a career in their chosen art form?*

#### **3.1.2      Secondary Research Questions**

In addition, a number of secondary research questions delineated the particular issues related to the primary question;

1. *What types of career supports are available to professionals in the performing arts?*
2. *What are the challenges that performing artists encounter in carving out their career?*
3. *How does postgraduate study contribute to their career development?*

The following sections outline the approach and methodology used to address these research questions.

### **3.2 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism**

An interpretivist paradigm underpinned this research study. A paradigm is a set of basic belief systems or philosophical assumptions representing the world view of the researcher which guides thinking and action (Mertens 2010; Thomas 2013). Such a belief system underpins the choice of research approach and the research methods that are most appropriate to the study being undertaken (White 2009). The challenge of categorizing educational and psychological research into a few paradigms is recognised (Mertens 2010). Mertens (2010) identifies four main frameworks; post positivist, constructivist, pragmatic and transformative asserting that “the lines between them are not altogether clear in practice” (p.10).

Within guidance research, the subject of vocational and career decision making may be viewed from diverse philosophical stances. The traditional differential approach of Parsons (1909) and Holland (1997) view career as a fit between the person and their environment. As work environments and conditions have changed significantly (and continue to change) over the past century, so too has shifted, the value and meaning of career in people’s lives (Savickas 2005). Alternative paradigms have now emerged where careers are regarded as constructions in response to unstable, new and constantly changing work environments (Hearne 2007; Savickas 2005, 2011a). Such constructivist approaches espoused by Savickas (2005) and Patton and McMahon (2014) reflect the “importance of adaptability and fluidity in creating one’s career narrative” (Hearne 2007, p.1).

The dominant paradigms in the social sciences are positivist and interpretivist (Thomas 2013). A positivist, or quantitative worldview, claims that knowledge about the social world can be obtained objectively and can be observed measured and studied. A positivist approach uses scientific methods to explain causal factors, consequently research methods tend to involve questionnaires, surveys, seeking hard data (Thomas 2013). A limitation of this latter approach is that the researcher remains neutral and objective, watching from the outside as ‘disinterested observers’ (Thomas 2013, p.108). Kierkegaard (1974) was concerned by this notion of objectivity when looking at laws governing human behaviour and argued for subjectivity and the researcher’s ability to consider his/her own relationship to the subject of the study (Cohen *et al.* 2007).

Conversely, an interpretivist paradigm or qualitative worldview, is interested in people, how they interrelate and how their world is constructed (Thomas 2013). Such an approach enables individuals to make meaning and construct reality in conjunction with the researcher (Robson and McCartan 2016). The basic assumption is that knowledge is socially constructed by those active in the research process, thus the researcher needs to understand these multiple social constructions from the point of view of those living it (Mertens 2010). Consequently, the interpretivist (qualitative) paradigm was appropriate for this research study where the researcher became the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). The study explored the actions and lived experiences of performing artists and the meaning attributed to their actions, i.e. thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptions (Marshall and Rossman 1999).

In this study, the researcher’s prior knowledge and experience of the arts sector was of benefit in elucidating the career experience and lived reality of participants in this investigation. This ontological position is concerned with the nature of participants’ reality, the meaning they make of their own career development and how they construct their career narrative in the context of their life experiences (Savickas 2005). Unlike positivism where objectivity is paramount, the interpretivist approach encouraged the researcher to draw upon her personal understandings of careers in the arts sector to assist in interpreting the views and behaviour of study participants (Thomas 2013). This required her to be conscious of her professional and social background, class, gender and ethnicity

to ensure against bias and to maintain a balanced viewpoint. The validity and rigour of the study countered any claims of bias. Findings from this study will not be generalizable but may be typical among the sample profile.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods**

This section will outline the data collection and analysis methods used in this study. Firstly, it will discuss the approach to accessing and sampling for the fieldwork.

#### **3.3.1 Access and Sampling**

The target population for this study was male and female performing arts professionals who had or are currently in the process of completing post graduate studies in Ireland. The rationale was to explore the potential contribution of professional studies to their career progression. Opening the study to participants from different performing art forms offered the possibility of identifying the lived realities including benefits inherent in this type of career. The final participant sample included five participants who had completed postgraduate studies and one participant who had not.

Ethical approval for the study was gained from UL's Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee on March 16, 2018. (Appendix A) Subsequently, a combination of purposive and convenience sampling methods was used to recruit participants. In order to avoid selection bias, which may have distorted the evidence and the validity of the study (Thomas 2013), the sampling strategy identified a mixed gender profile representing professionals from more than one art form and at differing stages of career development.

Study participants were recruited through HE postgraduate course gatekeepers in theatre and music in two HE institutions, as well as through arts organisations.

Purposive sampling is defined as a strategic approach to the selection of participants with direct reference to the research questions being asked (Bryman 2012). The researcher gained support in accessing a suitable sample through Course Directors (gatekeepers) of

three HE postgraduate performing arts courses. In addition, a convenience sampling strategy allowed the researcher to sample participants through contacts in her professional work in the sector, as well as through other arts professionals who engage with artists. This research was exploratory in nature (Cohen *et al.* 2007) and it is not assumed that these sampling methods will represent the entire professional performing artists' population. However, it is hoped this approach provides a diverse range of experiences and insights into this professional sector. Subject information letters and consent forms were provided to gatekeepers of both the three HE performing arts courses (Appendix B and C), and the arts organisations (Appendix D and E). This documentation outlined the purpose and scope of the study, addressing such issues as informed consent and confidentiality (Bell 2010; Hearne 2013). Subject Information letters and consent forms were also provided to participants recruited through HE performing arts courses and through arts organisations (Appendix F, G, and H).

### **3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

In this study, a series of semi structured interviews were carried out with six participants. The research was concerned with understanding human behaviour; it was process oriented, subjective and valid, producing real, rich deep data (Blaxter *et al.*, 2010). The emphasis was on gathering detailed accounts of the multiple realities and the complexities of performing artists lives, conveying the full picture of experiences being studied (Punch, 2014). These 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) provided rich accounts of the nuances of life experiences rather than reductionist simplistic interpretations (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Qualitative data collection techniques such as interviews, focus groups and observations were considered prior to concentrating on the semi-structured interview method. Of the six interviews, two were face to face and four were carried out via Skype (see Table 3.1). The Skype interviews were conducted at the request of participants to accommodate their work schedule and availability. *Table 3.1*, provides details on participants gender and age, current occupation and postgraduate status and the date, type and duration of the interviews.

Pseudo-nym	Gender	Age Group	Present Occupation	Post Grad Status	Date	Method And Time
Susan	Female	mid 40's	PhD student	MA Theatre	11/5/2018	Skype 52.13
Ciara	Female	mid 30's	arts administrator	MA Traditional Music	29/5/2018	Skype 47.46
Alan	Male	early 30's	actor & theatre maker	MA Theatre	10/6/2018	Skype 42.21
Michael	Male	mid 50's	traditional musician	No post Grad	15/6/2018	Face to face 50.44
Elaine	Female	mid 40's	traditional musician	MA Traditional Music	21/6/2018	Skype 73.57
Aoife	Female	mid 20's	music teacher, secondary school	MA Community Music	13/7/2018	Face to face 44.47

**Table 3.1 Participant Profile**

Cohen *et al.* (2007) describe interviews as ‘a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal and heard’ (p.349). Interviews can draw on the way a response is made such as tone of voice, facial expression, and hesitation to provide information that a written response would not reveal (Bell 2010).

An advantage of using interviews in this study was that while having a structured format, there was space for the researcher to respond in the moments about more ‘complex and deep issues’ (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p.349). Similarly, Bryman (2012) argues that a semi

structured interview format allows for varying the sequence of questions and asking further questions in response to what may be significant replies. In the interviews, the researcher followed the flow of participants' career narratives, responding in the moment to language used and to issues and raised by participants. The success of this approach also depended on establishing a dialogue and rapport with the study's participants and in conducting rich and authentic interviews (Mason 2002; McLeod 2015).

However, the comparability of responses may be reduced if the sequencing and wording of interview questions is altered too much (Cohen *et al.* 2007). While this may be a challenge when analysing the data, this issue did not arise in the current study. Interviews are also time consuming and may be inconvenient to participants' schedule and availability. In this research, three interviews were re-scheduled a number of times due to participants lack of availability. Moreover, interviews are a subjective technique and there is always a risk of researcher bias (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Bell 2010). This issue is addressed separately in Section 3.7.

In this study, carrying out the semi-structured interviews required some detailed and rigorous planning, particularly regarding the structure and the flow of the interview (Mason 2002). Developing an 'interview guide' (Bryman 2012, p.472) provided a level of order and focus to the interview questions. These questions emerged as areas of curiosity during the literature review process and drew on the researchers own experience of career development in this sector. The interview framework addressed four areas: (i) early career decisions and influences; (ii) career development as a new graduate; (iii) the effect of post graduate studies on career development, and (iv) general questions related to career development in the performing arts (Appendix I).

Four of the interviews were conducted via Skype. This computer application was a useful tool when time was restricted and it offered convenience to participants and to the researcher when availability was limited due to busy work schedules and distance (Hanna 2012). Skype interviews took place in the researcher's home office where she was undisturbed and followed the same procedures as face to face interviews in terms of the

interview framework, access and sampling. A limitation of Skype is that it requires participants to be proficient in the downloading and the use of the application and having a computer that can run the application (Weller 2015). The use of technology can also present some challenges, such as the quality of internet connection on both sides and potential time lags and disjointed discussion (Bryman 2012). This was experienced in the interview with Alan, where there were some difficulties with the quality of internet connection at times. This was overcome by pausing the interview and re-establishing a more stable connection.

In terms of format, 'taking care' (p.152) of participants through pre-interview contact, the sequencing of interview questions and opening and closing of sessions all contributed to building rapport between participant and researcher and influenced the degree of openness and depth of data supplied (McLeod 2015).

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Confidentiality was maintained by changing identifying information such as names (McLeod 2015). All of the raw data was stored appropriately, the data was anonymised, encrypted and stored securely (Bell 2010; Bryman 2012). While anonymity cannot be guaranteed in face to face interview research, 'non-traceability' may be a more realistic aim (Punch 2014, p.48). Thus, the recordings were deleted when the data was analysed.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Strategy**

According to McLeod (2015) 'becoming immersed in the data' (p.154) is an important first step in qualitative analysis. This was achieved through the process of conducting the interviews, transcribing them, reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and field notes (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). The raw data from the interviews was analysed using a qualitative data analysis process (Creswell 2009). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic framework was employed to organise and prepare the collected data, code the data, identify emerging themes and interpret these themes. The transcribed raw data was analysed using a constant comparative method (Thomas 2013). This process involved organising and preparing the collected data, going through the data comparing all

elements, identifying emerging themes and interpreting these themes (Cresswell 2009). Theme mapping (Thomas 2013) offered a framework to illuminate the interconnections between themes drawing on quotations to illustrate the point. This process identified the key themes and sub-themes emerging. This type of analysis assisted in identifying similarities and differences in data, repetitive use of words or ideas and any missing data.

### **3.5 Validity and Reliability Issues in Interpretivist Research**

Validity and reliability constitute essential quality criteria within quantitative research. Validity describes the trustworthiness and credibility of research outcomes, whether or not something measures what it claims to measure (Robson and McCartan 2016). Reliability is concerned with whether or not the results of a study are repeatable (Bryman 2012).

However, with regard to interpretivist research, these issues are somewhat different. Cohen *et al.* (2007) describe reliability in an interpretivist study as the fit between what a researcher records as data and what takes place in the natural setting that is being researched. However, rather than striving for ‘uniformity’ (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p.149) a qualitative study aims to produce a ‘nuanced understanding of the topic rather than a factual truth’ (McLeod 2015, p.100). Thus, criteria of reliability in quantitative methodologies includes fidelity to real life, comprehensiveness, context-and-situation specificity, authenticity, depth of response, honesty and meaningfulness to the respondents (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p.149).

McLeod (2015) argues for the introduction of quality control concepts in qualitative research, which support the *credibility*, *dependability* and *trustworthiness* of the research. In this study, credibility was achieved by ensuring that the research was ethically appropriate (Blaxter *et al.* 2010) and conducted in a way that the subject was accurately identified and described (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Participant checks of interview transcripts ensured participant validation for accuracy and a means of checking internal validity (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Mertens 2010). To ensure rigour, a copy of their interview transcript was sent to each participant, checking for accuracy and asking if they wished to make any changes. Three participants were happy with their transcript, two did not

respond to this invitation and one participant availed of this opportunity to amend her transcript. Validity was further demonstrated through the use of examples of direct quotations to support the inferences drawn from the data (Mertens 2010).

Dependability was supported by the researcher adopting a critical reflexive stance throughout the process and ongoing monitoring of the researcher's decisions and reactions during the research process through the use of a research diary and ongoing supervision discussions. Other procedures relate to transparency around the way in which the data was analysed and disclosure of any relevant aspects of the researchers experience and identity (McLeod, 2015, p.100). Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue for rigour in the research process through trustworthiness and authenticity which is evidenced in the quality of the data produced through the depth of participant narratives.

Due to the size of the sample, findings from this study cannot be generalized; however, they are likely to have some relevance and broader applicability beyond the focus of this study to the performing arts sector. As this is an under-studied area, this small-scale research may build on existing knowledge about the phenomenon and shed light on the experience of developing and sustaining a career within this profession (Mertens 2010).

### **3.6 Ethical Issues Relevant to Research Study**

This research adhered to ethical guidelines and legislative requirements of the UL Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), ethics refers to theory, codes and practices concerned with ensuring that research is conducted in a moral and non-harmful manner. Hearne (2013) recommends that guidance research practitioners ought to be guided by a set of principles throughout the research process, particularly in relation to “competency, multiple relationships, avoidance of harm, confidentiality and informed consent” (p.6). The researcher was guided by the professional standards and ethical codes and principles as set out by the Institute of Guidance Counsellor's (2012) *Code of Ethics* and the National

Centre for Guidance in Education (2008) *Research Code of Ethics*. This research was conducted according to the core ethical principles in guidance research which are beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, fidelity and justice (Hearne 2013; McLeod 2010, 2015).

The researcher communicated the parameters of the research to the gatekeepers and participants including the methodology, benefits of the study, confidentiality issues and how the data would be stored and used (Bell 2010). The research was conducted in a manner that avoided harm to participants and maintained clear boundaries, respected confidentiality and gained informed consent from all parties involved, including gatekeeper consent (Hearne 2013; McLeod 2010). The participants gave signed consent to participate in the study prior to conducting face to face interviews. In cases where an interview was conducted through Skype, signed consent forms were received in advance.

While acknowledging the potential benefits of the research in illuminating the experience of the career development of performing artists, the personal costs to participants was minimized (Hearne 2013). As the researcher is quite close to this sector as a professional herself, she experienced moments where participants' narratives were mirroring her own experience of developing her own career: specifically, when Elaine articulated her frustrations of trying to get new arts initiatives off the ground. With this awareness, she re-focused her attention to the participant's narrative, bracketing off any emotional response and perspective, remaining firmly in the role of researcher.

### **3.7 Researcher Reflexivity and Bias**

A key aspect of this interpretivist study was researcher reflexivity. According to McLeod (2015), researcher reflexivity is concerned with how the researcher addresses his or her subjective involvement in the process of conducting the study. Similarly, Berger (2015) views reflexivity as a process of "continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation" (p.220). As referred to earlier, the researcher was not detached from this subject area as she has direct experience of forging a professional career in the arts. Consequently, she was conscious of her position within the study, her gender, status, social background,

interests, values, personal experiences and bias and the effect this may have on the “setting and the people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation” (Berger 2015, p.220). This worldview provides a lens through which the researcher views the world. There are both strengths and limitations to this positionality (Thomas 2013). As the researcher has worked within the arts sector over a number of years, she has some familiarity with the discourse within the sector and an understanding of the artistic processes, motivations of professional artists, and how these considerations may affect career development. This insider knowledge and understanding may encourage study participants to share their own experiences of career development (Berger 2015). Benefits also include building trust with study participants and being sensitized to the research issue (McLeod 2015). However, ‘ongoing reflexive self-monitoring’ (McLeod 2015, p.12) ensured against the blurring of boundaries between the researcher’s professional history and her role as practitioner researcher, avoiding the risk of subjectivity and bias (Punch 2009).

It is proposed that bracketing off the researcher’s preconceptions and presuppositions “can render audible the nuances and subtleties of participants’ responses” and protected against the risk of categorizing responses into predetermined groupings (Tufford and Newman 2012, p.91). According to Hart (1998), bracketing off, means adopting a particular attitude to the world and “placing brackets around the assumptions and understandings that we take for granted” (p.104). The iterative nature of qualitative research resulted in an ongoing process of moving between data collection and data analysis, revisiting data as the researcher’s comprehension of the topic evolved (Tufford and Newman 2012). In this study, such an approach avoided filtering participants’ experience through the researcher’s own personal and professional experience (Tufford and Newman 2012). As the researcher has direct experience of developing a career in the arts sector, she was conscious of bracketing off her own beliefs, values and experience of the research topic so as not to bias the themes and findings emerging from the research. She sought professional supervision throughout the research process and journaled regularly and she was mindful of the ethical issues involved. In addition, dissertation supervision meetings helped the researcher maintain perspective throughout this investigation, being vigilant of her personal value system, her place in the power hierarchy and any potential role conflicts (Tufford and

Newman 2012). These strategies enhanced the researcher's ability to sustain a reflexive stance throughout.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodological approach of the study. A rationale for selecting an interpretivist paradigm was provided, and methods of data collection and analysis were addressed. Finally, the chapter discussed issues related to validity, reliability, ethics and reflexivity in undertaking this study.

## **Chapter 4      Primary Findings**

### **4.0      Introduction**

This chapter presents the analytical strategy used to examine the primary data and the findings from the interviews conducted with the six interviewees.

### **4.1      Data Analysis Strategy**

A thematic approach was used to analyse the collected data. Thematic analysis provided a method for identifying, analysing and representing patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Braun and Clarke's six phase thematic framework was employed. In phase 1, familiarisation with the data, the analysis process began with a thorough reading and re-reading of the written transcripts, field notes and observations by the researcher (Braun and Clarke 2012). In phase 2, generating initial codes, the data was coded using the Miles and Huberman (Miles and Huberman 1994) coding strategy (Appendix J). This was valuable for identifying descriptive codes early in the process and gaining a feel for the data (Punch 2014). Phase 3, searching for themes, involved coding and memoing data, allowing themes and sub-themes to emerge. A split page method (Thomas 2013) was applied in the coding, memoing and identification of themes. In phase 4, reviewing potential themes, using the constant comparison method allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes that captured the main content of the data. Phase 5, defining and naming themes, resulted in two main themes to be distinguished. Within each theme subthemes were identified, integrated and interpreted and these are presented as phase 6, in this Findings Chapter (Braun and Clarke 2012). Sections 4.3 and 4.4 address the two overarching themes that emerged from the data:

1. The nature of individuals career development in the performing arts
2. Factors that influence the career development of performing artists in Ireland.

## **4.2 Participant Profile**

Six performing artists were interviewed for this research, four females and two males. Their ages ranged from mid-20's to mid-50's approximately, representing different stages in career development from the early stage (Aoife) to a more established stage (Michael). Five of the six participants had completed postgraduate studies in the performing arts, and one had completed undergraduate studies only.

## **4.3 Theme 1: The Nature of Individuals' Career Development in the Performing Arts**

A number of sub themes emerged under this first theme: (i) perceptions of a performing arts career, (ii) career development and creative development, (iii) financial instability, and (iv) the solitary nature of arts careers.

### **4.3.1 Perceptions of a Performing Arts Career**

This first sub-theme relates to the preconceptions of others, primarily negative, towards a performing arts career which can impede individuals from entering the profession. Four participants discussed having to overcome personal and familial preconceptions of this career type and lifestyle in their career decision making. In the main this was driven by uncertainty, fear of the unknown and the perception that, as Susan stated, it 'was not a sustainable or stable career' choice. Thus, family members, in particular parents and in some cases the participants themselves, had some concerns about their ability to support themselves financially. As Ciara articulated:

If you are a musician your two options are play and teach....and if I was saying I didn't want to be a teacher in a sense I was cutting off fifty percent of potential income.

(Ciara)

On completion of their post-primary education, three of the participants were actively dissuaded by their parents from pursuing a performance related course (Susan, Ciara and Alan), instead progressing to courses in disciplines such as computers, architecture and business studies. respectively. For example, Ciara articulated: "in my heart I wanted to be a musician, absolutely" but family expectations and family concerns for her future, financially, guided her away from music towards another profession; "I just didn't have

the nerve to go through with it”. However, she knew this new direction “just wasn’t for me at all”. All three participants were advised by their parents that an artistic career is a second career, something that you do on the side rather than earn your living from it alone; “have a stable career and you can do your hobbies part time” (Alan); “do music on the side and you’ll always have it to fall back on” (Ciara); “you have to have something else so you can eat” (Susan). Susan articulated that she had “absorbed the message it wasn’t sustainable” and that consequently she had “resisted” the career choice for a long time.

Subsequently, however, all three participants completed a performing arts degree. Susan transferred to a theatre degree, and Ciara and Alan pursued postgraduate studies: “I finally pursued the thing that I love doing ... as opposed to the thing that would get me a mortgage”(Alan).

Another participant, Aoife had experienced strong parental encouragement to undertake a Professional Masters in Education (PME) after her music degree rather than pursuing professional work in music which she viewed as “exciting” and as “something I can go into” (Aoife). Elaine was dedicated to music performance throughout her teenage years and the decision to pursue music after post-primary school was naturally assumed within her family; “I didn’t even know if it was a career but I definitely wanted to keep doing it” (Elaine). In Michael’s case, a career as a traditional musician was simply not a choice when he left post-primary school in the 1980’s: “it was never considered to be a livelihood”.

#### **4.3.2 Career Development and Creative Development**

All of the participants articulated a strong connection between their “career development” and “creative development”. They expressed their need for ongoing opportunities to develop their own artistic practice and be challenged through new projects and collaborations, staying “agile and open” (Michael) to unexpected situations that arise. Michael made particular reference to the relationship between artist and audience; as a musician he has to stay “active and engaged” and audiences need to see “a continuous growth, and the existence of possibilities, and a reason to come again”. “The central point

is the artistic journey itself...I don't think you can disconnect that from your career"  
(Michael).

Three participants (Susan, Ciara and Elaine) articulated the difficulty of balancing a full-time arts administration role with an artistic role. For Susan and Ciara, the challenge is not having enough time to cultivate their own practice "one of my frustrations was...I didn't have much time for my creative practice...fortunately I found outlets here and there" (Susan). Ciara expressed frustration that her administrative role initially took her away from her creative practice: "I'm not in it for the administration, I'm in it for the creative side" and she had to make a conscious effort to create opportunities where she "got to play [music] and not just write emails". Elaine, who worked full time in an arts administration role, found that balancing that role with performing nightly "started to wear her down". She also became frustrated when her administrative role to support musicians overtook her role as a musician and she became viewed by some mainly as a "conduit of funding rather than a musician" (Elaine). This blurring of boundaries was difficult for her: "I'm actually a musician first" (Elaine).

Aoife, who works on a short-term contract in a post-primary school, has had opportunities for in-service professional development which she found "very, very helpful". By integrating all of her professional training, performance has now become a more significant part of her classroom work. This is important for her as:

It can really dampen your creativity when you're put into a classroom and you're told they have their Leaving Cert in a year's time, they have to know this, and if they don't they're going to fail.

(Aoife)

### **4.3.3 Financial Instability**

A key issue that emerged in the data was the precarious nature of working in the performing arts sector. Work and financial instability is a lived reality within this type of career as articulated by all of the participants. Susan enunciated that frequently the discourse among theatre students at undergraduate and postgraduate level is about "how to survive while keeping the career going", rather than about their career development.

Furthermore, it is assumed that people need a second job to support themselves financially; “there is very rarely the assumption that through arts funding, through touring, through working that you could actually eat” (Susan). Both Susan and Alan acknowledged that the nature of acting careers also favours those with the financial capital to begin with, as they can support themselves economically while being available to attend auditions. Alan discussed working on unpaid, profit share projects, especially when establishing his career and articulated that: “performing arts is something that won’t pay you enough to get a mortgage. If that’s your idea of success, then don’t work in the arts” (Alan).

The possibility of supporting oneself financially from performance alone was generally seen as very difficult. Susan articulated that she could not support herself financially purely from theatre work and it was only when she took on a non-artistic executive position at a theatre that this changed. Alan stated that earning an income fulltime depends on the art form you are working in, where you are based and who your audience is. Personal motivation and values are also an important element as “it depends on what you want to get out of it” (Elaine). All of the participants concurred that there are artists who are managing to support themselves but it is difficult and “they won’t be rich out of it” (Elaine). The irregularity of the work and the income flow was highlighted as something artists must learn to manage. Aoife stated that “you could have work for three months and then you mightn’t have work for nine months”.

The interviewees provided varying perspectives on whether State funding of the arts is sufficient for artists’ career development. Aoife (early in her career) and Michael (established in his career) believed that there are more opportunities now to access funding and support through various Arts Council programmes, Culture Ireland, Music Network and through 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions. On the other hand, Susan, Ciara, Alan and Elaine all expressed some level of frustration with funding of the performing arts in Ireland. Three participants believed that funding is insufficient (Susan, Alan, Ciara) and falls behind that provided by other European countries (Susan). Elaine was concerned by what she perceives as a lack of understanding of traditional music by some funders. Alan found that the Arts Council funding application process favours those who are both very creative and very practical, and Ciara who works in an arts administration role believes artists are not

fully familiar with the funding that may be available or the language of grant applications: “they’re [artists] very good at being artists and sometimes they’re not as tuned in to the funding that might be out there or available” (Ciara).

Finding the balance between “stability and instability” (Susan) in one’s professional life is an ongoing challenge in artistic careers. All of the participants felt drawn to this career type, even if they had resisted it for some time. Michael, who is well established in his field, compared to the younger participants, articulated “nobody can offer you any assurances whatsoever about anything like that [career success]”. Michael discussed the “security” that musicians can find within their careers once they overcome “the initial terror of living in the gig economy”. This security arises from the fact that a musician can see his/her audience “wear away” and he/she has time to “readjust and re-orient” what they do. In that process “you have learned how to be in control of your life and nobody can actually fire you” (Michael). This “security” he contrasted with those in regular jobs where employment stability and security may disappear without warning.

#### **4.3.4 Solitary Nature of the Career**

The six participants discussed the solitary nature of a performing arts careers and how performance and the process of securing work draws very much on their own personal and artistic resources. Many performing artists are self-employed as musicians and performers and have to balance the artistic and business aspects of their career, alone. Susan perceived that if you were in the arts “you were on your own”. Ciara concurred “they [artists] can be so alone”. This ‘aleness’ was also evident when seeking work: “I did a lot of research by myself” you have to be “self-motivated” (Aoife); “you have to face the challenge yourself” (Michael); “constant self-motivation” (Alan). However, self-motivation can be difficult at times, particularly the frequent experience of auditioning and rejection in theatre professions. Alan articulated that how he feels about his career ‘always changes’ and is influenced by his work status: “Last week I was rejected from two different jobs and I wasn’t so happy and I was looking up going back into doing teaching” (Alan).

Almost all of the participants discussed needing to draw upon and trust their own resilience at some stage. Michael articulated that there is some value in taking the risk and walking “into the unknown”, but cautioned “try not to buy into the narratives out there of the impossibility of doing these things”. The harshness of this career lifestyle is evident in the tone and language used by some participants: “your ego will be crushed and thrown back at you” (Alan); you need a “thick skin, especially being a female” (Elaine); “it’s a hard life” (Ciara); “living pretty close to the bone” (Susan).

A range of challenges emerged in relation to careers in the performing arts such as disappointments at not getting acting roles, lack of understanding by organisations of time spent planning and developing funding applications, working without Board or management support, creative/artistic needs being sacrificed to administrative responsibilities. However, two participants, Aoife who is at an early career stage and Michael who is at a more stable career stage, discussed the challenges in a more tempered and objective way: “experience new things, get your foot into everything, but don’t let people take advantage of you” (Aoife);

You find out you are made of more than you think you are if you commit to doing it. Everyone is capable and ultimately, I think, we have to carve a unique path.

(Michael).

Nonetheless, the participants also spoke about the benefits from this type of career, primarily the creative and artistic freedom it affords them. Michael now has the opportunity to “create many different kinds of collaborations and projects” with other artists, which have made “life more interesting and varied”. Aoife gains significant professional satisfaction from being able to inspire her students. Ciara derives satisfaction from “making a difference to an artist’s life” in her role as an arts administrator. Alan enunciated how his self-awareness has grown through his drama and theatre career:

The greatest, sort of, gift of working in a performance art, anything in the arts, you get so much time with yourself you get to know yourself a lot better.

(Alan)

#### **4.4 Factors that Influence the Career Development of Performing Artists in Ireland**

The second theme relates to the factors that potentially help or hinder a performing artist's career development. There are five sub themes: (i) networks, networking and word of mouth (ii) geographical location (iii) gender issues (iv) adaptability to working in diverse settings and environments and (v) the contribution of post graduate studies to career development.

##### **4.4.1 Networks, Networking and Word of Mouth**

All of the participants highlighted the significant role of personal networks and networking in progressing a career in the performing arts. Susan emphasised the importance of finding “your artistic community”, developing relationships and friendships with other artists “who get it”, as well as being surrounded by “like-minded people”. In her case, moving into academia provided such a network. For Alan, forging professional relationships is an ongoing process and he is “constantly trying to develop those networks”.

Word of mouth connections were viewed as very valuable when searching for work, in particular short-term contracts. Susan articulated that when it comes to developing a career, “so much is about who you know”. This may also be viewed as a limitation as she described herself as “introverted” and finds this type of social and professional networking challenging “I’ve always found that a bit of a struggle”. Nevertheless, such networks are helpful in sharing professional knowledge of the sector and important early in one's career.

In terms of the participants' career decision making, they draw on a diverse range of support systems such as family members, friends, peers, former teachers, Course Directors and tutors, as well as accessing information online. One participant, Ciara, availed of professional career guidance services to support her in her career decision making beyond third level. Other supports cited were the social welfare system and other professionals in the sector such as actors.

#### **4.4.2 Geographical Location**

A key finding that emerged is the relevance of geographical location in optimising one's career opportunities in the performing arts, with a perception that greater opportunities are available in large cities like Dublin. Geographical location was cited by five participants (Alan, Aoife, Ciara, Elaine and Michael) as key to how their career progressed. For Alan, it was only when he moved to a large city that he began to see theatre performance as a business. On his MA "he had learned the craft but he had to learn the business side of it as well" and in Dublin he saw artists (actors and musicians) creating their own work "putting themselves out there and enjoying the craft" (Alan). Similarly, Ciara and Aoife had encountered a perception by people working in the arts that moving to Dublin is a natural next step in furthering one's career. Where Aoife lives, finding a music teaching post in a post-primary school is "impossible" "unless you're willing to move to Dublin or move to somewhere like that" (Aoife). Elaine also described "professional isolation" where she is located, where it tends to be more difficult to find other like-minded artists to create projects and "make things happen". Michael, who lived abroad for many years, found a more open mind-set to the idea of being a musician than in Ireland and he experienced more freedom to be what he wanted to be while living abroad: "People wouldn't ever have looked at it in that kind of impossible way that I was looking at it".

#### **4.4.3 Gender Issues**

Three of the six participants highlighted gender related issues within the performing arts sector. Both theatre artists (Susan and Alan) identified the issue of the limited and narrower range of work opportunities for women, particularly as they become older. Moreover, the pressure on females to have a certain look or "body type" is very prevalent with some of her female colleagues "aging out at 35/40" (Susan). There is an expectation that females might progress into "directing or production of some form because your face is no longer appropriate on the stage" (Susan). Susan's first-year university student cohort comprises 80% female students, while 60-70% of performance positions go to males, demonstrating a clear bias towards males within the profession:

Despite flooding the market with young women, those who are rewarded with financial success, with career success, in terms of their work actually being seen by the public are not those young women. (Susan)

According to Alan having a certain “look” or “sound” can be an issue for male actors and can either improve or reduce their chances of getting voiceover work or being cast in advertisements, for example.

One female participant from a traditional music background also highlighted gender as an obstacle in what is predominantly viewed as a male dominated industry. For Elaine, this was evident on festival listings when they (festival committees) have “a set list of people they get every year”, “they get a formula and they like to stick to it”. Although Aoife articulated that she did not experience any issues related to gender she did acknowledge “actually I don’t think I know any male music teachers in a secondary school”. Ciara worked in a technical role for many years, in a traditionally male dominated area, and she chose to steer her career in another direction due to the physical nature of the job and the anti-social, long hours; “I knew I wanted a life”.

#### **4.4.4 Adaptability to Working in Diverse Settings and Environments**

Another factor in the development of a performing arts career is the capacity to diversify and a willingness to collaborate artistically. Ciara articulated that “those that do well push themselves outside their comfort zone” and their “boundaries”. For Alan, “finding different forms of expression” gives him energy and further develops his craft. A diverse working life including acting (stage, commercials, voice overs), directing (create new work) and facilitating drama workshops, have all provided Alan with a better chance of supporting himself financially. Furthermore, by pitching his theatre work towards a tourist audience he has a “regular gig” and can support himself financially, balancing the “business side of things” (Alan) with the artistic, and allowing him free up time to attend auditions. The challenge of being available for auditions was also confirmed by Susan who articulated that a theatre career:

Is more accessible to people who have the capital to begin with...if you can afford to not have a stable income for up to five years you’re in a much better position to get the gigs.

(Susan)

Elaine and Michael, both traditional musicians, referred to the career choices they had made in response to commercial initiatives and touring opportunities which ultimately proved un-satisfying for both of them. Elaine, who toured abroad, found not playing “live” at some shows very difficult, “I just hated every minute” and that she would find the notion of only playing to tourists all the time as “soul destroying”. Michael described being able to live “comfortably enough” as a musician in his early career, playing in bars, but there “wasn’t much centre to what I was doing”. Thus, in both cases, the need to perform in a way that held meaning and value to them personally, outweighed any financial reward they might gain: “every time I play I am completely, one hundred percent in that moment” (Elaine).

#### **4.4.5 The Contribution of Post Graduate Studies to Career Development**

This sub theme is focused on the contribution of postgraduate studies to career development for the five participants. Four of the study participants have completed post graduate studies. A fifth participant is completing her PhD. The sixth participant has completed undergraduate studies only.

Aoife’s “eyes have been opened to a whole other world” through her MA programme. The experience empowered her to see herself more as a facilitator of musical experiences with groups and free of college labels, where “you’re either a violinist or you’re a singer” (Aoife). Subsequently her goal of attaining a regular teaching post had far less appeal: “I’m looking at it in different way” (Aoife). Postgraduate studies have also had a significant impact artistically and economically on Susan and marked a major change in her career. Her decision to move to Ireland, has also opened the doors to a career in academia which she had not contemplated prior to undertaking her PhD studies. Alan realised that he really wanted to be an actor and not knowing the next steps in realising that ambition he viewed his MA theatre course as a way to meet people. It was while doing this programme that “I slowly actually figured out what it was that I was going into” (Alan).

For Ciara, postgraduate studies in traditional music removed any feeling of regret she had carried about not pursuing her musical ambitions earlier in her career. However, she did not

feel it really impacted her career at that point and neither did she expect it to. Elaine expressed some disappointment that her postgraduate studies in traditional music did not really give her what she wanted at the time as she felt her priorities musically did not fit easily with the course expectations. However, it “gave time to be able to focus on playing and focus on how I wanted to play” (Elaine).

The level of career supports available and availed of during their postgraduate studies varied. Susan, a PhD student, particularly highlighted the career supports she receives from her institution as “varied and comprehensive”. She transitioned from theatre practice to academia, which she viewed at the time as a “little more stable” career option (Susan). Regarding career development supports, two respondents referred to inputs they received on this area whilst a post graduate student (Aoife and Alan). Aoife cited an assignment to prepare, present and pitch a business plan as part of her programme which she found very helpful. Alan, on the other hand, felt he didn’t know how to make a full career out of acting and the career inputs he received related more to developing his artistic work: “[in college] all I ever did was learn lines and perform...learn the craft...but I had to learn the business end of it’ (Alan). Finally, other participants, Ciara and Elaine, did not refer to career supports they availed of on their MA programme.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of the six interviews conducted in this research. The following chapter will synthesise these findings with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide a synthesis and critical interpretation of the core findings that emerged from the study in the context of the research questions and literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

### 5.1 Synopsis of Findings in Context of Research Questions

The overall focus of this study has been to explore the experience of career development for performing artists within the performing arts industry in Ireland. The primary research question asked '*What is the experience of performing arts professionals in developing and sustaining a career in their chosen art form?*'. The secondary research questions related to the types of career supports that are available to performance artists, the challenges they may encounter in carving out their career, and the contribution of post graduate studies to their career development.

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm to examine the lived experiences of performing artists. While this is a small-scale study, it provides an insight into what a career in the performing arts looks like today through participants' experiences of establishing and cultivating a career in their professional sector. The findings revealed that the perception of the career type as unstable and insecure echoed the experiences of all of the participants in the study (Beirne *et al.* 2017). They unanimously highlighted the singular and somewhat solitary nature of the profession, and the fact that artists draw continually on their own personal and artistic resources to establish themselves in their careers. In all cases, participants articulated instances when they did not know how to progress their career or what steps to take. This concurs with Gati and Levin (2014) who highlight that individuals sometimes need help to overcome the difficulties that impede their career decision making.

From a constructivist perspective, the findings also highlight the issue of developing and sustaining a career when the career pathways or progression routes in the arts are largely uncertain and have to be constructed by the individual (Savickas 2005).

In particular, the findings correlate with previous Irish research (Arts Council 2010a) in that performing artists demonstrate a range of dispositional assets such as self-motivation, resilience, commitment, and courage while developing their career. Participants in the current study articulated a strong connection between their career development and their artistic/creative development viewing a symmetry between both. However, some participants felt that ‘career development’ is not a term commonly used amongst artists themselves. The study findings reveal the complexity of this career type with a number of factors both helping and hindering career progression, such as the availability of personal and professional networks (Allen 2018; Atlas *et al.* 2003), the artists’ location and the availability of work there, their adaptability to working in diverse settings and particular issues around gender.

The overall findings will be discussed under two main themes that emerged:

1. The nature of careers in the performing arts
2. Career development of performing artists

## **5.2 Theme 1 The Nature of Careers in the Performing Arts**

This section will address the nature of careers in the performing arts. There are three sub themes namely, financial resourcing of a career in the performing arts, entry points and influencers, perceptions of a performing arts career and cultural capital.

### **5.2.1 Financial Resourcing of a Career in the Performing Arts**

Findings of this study concur with McAndrew and McKimm’s (Arts Council 2010a) claims that artists “encounter variable, fragments and often unpredictable employment patterns” (p.25). The participants in the current study alluded to unstable income flow, risk and uncertainty in securing work. A key issue is the absence of multi annual funding to

arts organisations who provide supports to artists, which also creates instability within the sector. This also extends to the Arts Council, the State conduit of funding and support to the arts in Ireland. Not alone is the funding commitment unstable, it also falls way below other European countries. In 2013, EU average GDP spending on arts and culture stood at 0.6% with Ireland at the bottom of the European league table at 0.11% of GDP (Council of Europe 2017).

While Beirne *et al* (2017) found that many artists support their creative practice by working outside the sector; findings of this study do not fully concur with this view. Currently, all of the participants, except for two, work solely within the arts sector - two in performance, one in academia, and one in arts administration. The two exceptions work in the education sector as a music teacher (a temporary post) and one participant who for personal reasons, is involved in her music career on a part time basis. However, she expressed a desire to return to her music profession full time and she is planning for this. It is important to note that of the two participants working in performance alone, one is very established in his career, and the second has diversified within his theatre art form to support himself financially, doing, for example, voice over work, advertisements, stage work. One participant referred to social welfare support being important at different points in his career.

A major funding provider in the performing arts sector is the Irish Arts Council, where almost three out of five artists (56%) stated that Arts Council funding is important in supporting their work as artists (Arts Council 2010a). This does not necessarily concur with the findings of this study. Whilst almost all of the participants had direct experience of engaging with the Arts Council on funding matters, their experiences ranged from positive and helpful, to frustrating. However, it must be noted that two of the participants involved in this study are currently working as performers alone and the findings may have been different were all six participants full time performers. Of the other participants, three are involved in academia, arts administration and music teaching which means they have regular income streams. The other participant is involved in her music career part time, as described earlier. One participant found the Arts Council funding application process difficult due to the 'horrendously complicated forms'. The other participant, who is

familiar with the language of the Arts Council through her work, can see how difficult and off putting this process is for creative artists.

### **5.2.2 Entry Points and Influencers**

A social constructionist perspective offers insight into the complex relational influences that individuals experience as they converse about their careers (Bluestein *et al.* 2004). The developmental-relational model highlights the impact of siblings, friends and others in the decision making of adolescents and adults, in particular career related decisions (Phillips *et al.* 2001). The findings of this study correlate with Phillips *et al.*'s Action of Others model. as the influence of parents, friends, educators, other performers, and career guidance services on career decision making was evident. All of the participants cited the importance of relationships, in particular familial, in constructing and reconstructing vocational identity, shaping their early career choices, particularly post-secondary (Savickas 2005). The extent of this influence is an unexpected finding of this research, with half of the study participants guided by parents, away from their initial career choice in the performing arts after post primary school. This finding concurs with McCoy *et al.* (2014) who found that students discuss their future careers in the main with their parents and guardians. Family systems theory explores the impact of relationships within the family, particularly parental relationships and the part it plays in career choice. Parental influence can have a significant impact on career choice, more so than gender, socio economic status or educational achievement (Penick and Jepsen 1992). Enmeshed or disengaged family relationships can affect career choices, where individuals may receive conflicting (enmeshed) or directive (disengaged) advice from parents (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 2013).

The findings of this study reveal that three of the six participants were discouraged by their parents from pursuing a career in the arts after post primary school. Consequently, the findings suggest there may be a perception amongst parents that the performing arts is an insecure sector in which to follow a career. The Actions of Others framework illustrates seven ways in which those involved in an individual's life may include themselves in their decision making, ranging from low level involvement 'non-active support' to high level involvement, 'criticism' (Phillips *et al.* 2001). Aligning with Phillips *et al.*'s, (2001)

framework, the parental involvement for those participants who were initially dissuaded from their third level career choice, was at a high level, ‘push/nudge’ or ‘forced guidance’. While three participants compromised about their career choice (Gottfredson 1981) after their Leaving Certificate, they subsequently formed a stronger sense of their career identity and self-concept (Super 1957, Savickas 2011b), and pursued their arts career in postgraduate studies or transferred into undergraduate studies to pursue a performing arts career demonstrating strong personal agency (Barnes *et al.* 2011).

### **5.2.3 Perception of a Career in the Performing Arts**

Traditionally the term career has been characterized by a “linear sequence of ‘jobs’ which have a vertical ‘advancement related’ trajectory” (Patton and McMahon 2014, p.5). As the world of work has changed, there has been a shift away from this traditional view of a linear career, progressing through a single occupation and employer (Bridgstock 2012). The protean career (Hall 2002) and boundaryless career (Arthur and Rousseau 1996) all refer to individuals being proactive and self-directive in navigating their own unique career path. Equally, this career type sees individuals “finding security in ongoing employability rather than ongoing employment” (Bridgstock 2005, p.40). Those working in the creative arts have long histories of a protean type career, which lacks both an orderly job sequence and vertical progression (Wyszomirski and Chang 2017). In this study, three participants, before entering the profession, had a negative perception of an artistic career and this emerged as a key issue for them. On the other hand, two participants were confident in their progression into a music career, one as a teacher and one as a musician. For one participant who finished post primary education in the early 1980’s, a career as a traditional musician was not an option and, therefore, he did not consider it.

One of the key, commonly held perceptions identified in this study, is that a career in the arts, in particular the performing arts unstable and insecure (Beirne *et al.* 2017). In this study, there appeared to be a general perception amongst some parents, some family members and guidance counsellors that this career route was risky. One participant cited her guidance counsellor steering her away from music towards courses with higher CAO points as she had the points to get them. The notion that an artistic career is a secondary

career or something that one does in their free time or ‘for free’, diminishes the status of the career type, and how it is valued (Atlas *et al.* 2003).

In spite of these perceptions, the vocational aspect of the performing arts emerged strongly in this study. Participants felt drawn to this career type seeing it almost as a ‘vocation’ and part of their self-identity. This finding concurs with previous research into the socio-economic conditions of theatre practitioners in Ireland (Hibernian Consulting 2005; Arts Council 2010a). It has been found that despite the challenges of their career type, the vast majority of artists stated that they would again choose to work as an artist if they were starting over (Arts Council 2010a). All of the participants in this current study stated that they felt drawn to this type of career, even if they did not enter the profession directly from secondary school. Some of the participants articulated the meaning of their artistic work in their lives and the importance of work they engage in having meaning and value to them and to others (Savickas, 2011c). This finding concurs with previous research into protean careers in the arts sector, a career type which is thought to place “self-fulfilment and psychological success above career norms that would have their sources outside of the individual” (Wyszominski and Chang 2017, p.12). The protean career reflects the concerns of the career actor who exercises work-life balance factors in individualizing their career self-management (Tams and Arthur 2010). This reflects a desire for a creatively satisfying and economically sustainable career in the arts sector (Wyszominski and Chang 2017). This current study may stimulate further discourse on how artists are managing to achieve this balance and the extent to which they feel equipped to do so.

#### **5.2.4 Cultural Capital**

Social environments and family backgrounds have an influence on individual’s access to educational and occupational opportunities (Kidd 2006). Life chances and access to knowledge and experiences can influence how an individual view their career opportunities (Super 1957). This cultural capital, (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), which is determined by family background and social environment, affects the opportunities that are available and accessible. Cultural capital is the accumulation of behaviours, knowledge and skills that one can access to demonstrate one’s cultural competence and thus one’s standing in society (Bourdieu 1986). The social capital of friendships and opportunities for

social interaction through performance is very evident in the findings of this study (Bourdieu 1986). This connection with ‘spatially and socially close others’ is crucial for maintaining employability in the creative industries (Alacovska 2018, p.10). The majority of participants received broad exposure to the arts early in their lives and as teenagers, with many examples of parents and extended family being involved in music playing and drama. This exposed the participants to role models at home and at school (music teachers) which may be a contributing factor to their career formation (Gibson 2004; Super 1957). Two participants were drawn to pursue a career in music by the enthusiasm and inspiration of their school music teacher. However, although participants were encouraged to express themselves artistically and creatively in childhood and adolescence, for some of them this encouragement did not extend to performing arts as a viable career choice. Interestingly, it was only those from a theatre background who stressed the importance of starting young and gaining experience early if one wishes to pursue an acting career.

### **5.3 Theme 2 Career Development of Performing Artists**

This section will address the second theme, which is the career development of performing artists in Ireland today through three sub-themes: (i) individualised career path, (ii) networking and professional development in the performing arts, and, (iii) career supports and the role of career guidance professionals.

#### **5.3.1 Individualised Career Pathways**

As it has become less common for people to spend their adult working life in one industry or occupation, careers have become more individualised (Kidd 2006). According to Roberts (1968) this ‘individualisation’ has led to greater uncertainty in career development, as people feel more responsible for the direction of their future working lives. The need for career management skills (CMS), particularly in managing non-linear career pathways, becomes increasingly more important (Sultana 2012). Overall, the findings concur that career development in the performing arts is individualised and follows a non-linear career trajectory (Fouad and Bynne 2008). This protean career (Briscoe and Hall, 2006) is directed by the individual based on personal goals and interests with career development resting with the individual not with the organisation (Savickas *et al.* 2009). The findings of this study indicate that all participants felt empowered by the

freedom to manage and drive their own career and to be able to create and take advantage of chance events and opportunities (Bright and Pryor, 2005; Krumboltz, 2009).

Wyszomirski and Chang, (2017) describe this concept as career 'self-structuration' where an individual creates their own personalized work life and career 'self-management', which describes the day to day management of that work life in order to sustain it (p 2).

The findings of this study confirm that while each career path is individual and unique to each participant, there are some similarities in the challenges encountered, such as insecure income flow and unstable project or contract-based work conditions. This necessitated participants' compromising their career expectations and choices based on sometimes, limiting environmental factors, such as the availability of work, and significant career insecurity (Gottfredson 2005).

With regard to the current study, each participants career path was unique and was influenced by the art form they work in, genre, talent, geography, age and gender. However, some similarities emerged in the personal attitudes, interests and the values participants brought with them as identified in the literature (Gati and Levin 2014). The specific qualities of determination, perseverance, commitment, drive, passion, resilience and having a 'thick skin' evidently play a part in an artist being successful and committing to this career type, even when it is difficult (Kidd 2006). All of the participants cited times when these personal attributes carried them through career crossroads, career uncertainty and moments of self-doubt. In the main, participants looked internally for guidance drawing on their own wisdom in seeking a way forward as has been articulated in literature (Savickas 2011a). Outwardly, over the lifespan of their career, guidance was sought from their professional and personal support network such as family, friends, fellow artists and colleagues. Only one participant sought the services of a professional guidance practitioner to support her career decision making in adulthood. Another participant availed of professional guidance services external to the post-primary school system during Leaving Certificate. In particular, participants cited difficulties in developing a career with an unclear horizon, and all of them articulated instances when they did not know how to progress their career. This suggests that artists need to develop a range of career skills such as career management skills, decision making and resilience (Kidd 2006).

### **5.3.2 Networking and Professional Development for Performing Artists**

As this study has shown, a professional career in the performing arts does not resemble many other professions in a number of key attributes, one of which is the degree to which artists have personal responsibility for their own career development (Bridgstock 2005). The significance of professional networking within the cultural sector was highlighted by all participants in progressing their career and in forging professional alliances with other artists, arts organisations and arts venues (Atlas *et al.* 2003). Networking, helped provide a pathway to other work opportunities, bolster reputation and income, validation, as well as the emotional support of being surrounded by like-minded people (Alacovska 2018). Additionally, professional networks support artists transitioning from training into their professional life, and through the voluntary and involuntary career transitions over a lifespan (Middleton and Middleton 2017). The findings of this study confirm that personal and professional networking also minimized the risk of professional isolation particularly for those artists based outside of urban areas. However, it has been found that informal networking can be difficult for some, and can reinforce social inadequacies as highlighted by one participant in this study (Zell *et al.* 2014).

In Ireland, professional development, networking and supports are provided in the main by public arts and cultural agencies and institutions, local authority arts offices, non-profit arts organisations and arts centres (Bell 2015). From the researcher's experience, there has been a noticeable increase in the number and range of these opportunities available to artists. The Arts Council, as the main agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland (Arts Council 2018), indirectly supports these professional development opportunities through its funding of these organisations. However, these professional development initiatives are small scale, and cater for only a small number of artists annually. It is interesting to note that in this study, no participant articulated having availed of these types of opportunities. Such professional development opportunities also reflect the Arts Council's strategic goal to support the professional development of artists and arts professionals over the lifespan (Arts Council 2017). This study finds that informal peer to peer mentoring is commonplace place within the cultural sector, with many study participants benefitting from the good will of small arts organisations, fellow artists, administrators and others for information and advice, help with grant applications, being guided towards other resources and for encouragement. Many participants also cited times

when they offered this same support to fellow artists. This concurs with research findings on the support structure for artists in the United States, *Inventing in Creativity* (Atlas *et al.* 2003). Generally, this type of informal support is undocumented and therefore more difficult to quantify and assess (Atlas *et al.* 2003).

One of the research questions of this study sought to examine is the contribution of postgraduate studies to the career development of performing artists. The Arts Council research in 2010 (Arts Council 2010a) found that 39% of artists in Ireland had completed post graduate or professional studies, lower than in Finland where 49% of artists had completed the highest level of professional training in their field (Arts Promotion Centre Finland 2010). Five of the six participants in this study had completed some form of postgraduate studies and their contribution to their career progression varied for each participant ranging from life changing to very little. This effect was influenced by the participants own expectations and needs at the time and the career and life stage they were at (Super 1957). While the effect artistically and economically for two participants was career transforming (Mezirow *et al.* 2000; Hoggan 2016), another participant felt her postgraduate study did not really impact on her career and neither had she expected it to. Interestingly, the only participant who had not undertaken postgraduate studies has a very established music career. Thus, this study finds that postgraduate studies may not be a prerequisite for career stability and success in the performing arts, but a larger scale study would be beneficial to explore this further.

### **5.3.3 Career Supports and the Role of Career Guidance Professionals**

This study has found that career decision making for individuals in the performing arts is a complex process. As stated previously, it involves a number of parties, the individual, parents, family, other artists, guidance counsellors and subject teachers. It is a career type where there is potential for bias depending on an individual's perceptions of the career area. Career guidance counsellors working with clients may find it helpful to examine family career patterns and values related to certain careers to support young people in their decision making (Sharf 2010). Awareness of the influences on a client's career decision making may help a guidance counsellor support a client to consider options and alternatives (Gati and Levin 2014; Sharf 2010). This study found that participants had very

different experiences of guidance counselling services in relation to their post-secondary career choices. Some found their guidance counsellor to be very knowledgeable and helpful, whereas other practitioners had limited knowledge of specific career types such as music performance. One participant availed of independent career guidance services during post-primary school, however he felt his broad interest and ability in lots of subject areas hindered the value of this process for him. He subsequently dropped out of his undergraduate course choice and eventually found his way to performing arts in postgraduate studies.

While the findings suggest that there are variables in each participant's experience of career guidance services, they have implications for guidance counselling practice at post primary level. Under the Education Act (Education Act 1998) it is a statutory requirement that each post primary school devise a whole school guidance plan, ensuring that students have access to appropriate guidance in their career and educational choices. Adopting a whole school approach to guidance counselling requires guidance counsellors, as well as a range of other individuals such as subject teachers and parents, to be involved in the process (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005; Institute of Guidance Counsellors 2008). The guidance counsellor is primarily responsible for the delivery of guidance counselling services empowering students to make decisions about their lives, including career decisions (Institute of Guidance Counsellors 2016). What this current research indicates is that some guidance counsellors may have knowledge limitations regarding this career area, including the routes into performing arts careers and progression pathways thereafter. In addition, professional self-regulation regarding potential bias by guiding clients away from a performing arts career towards a more 'stable' career may be an issue.

With regard to teacher involvement, subject teachers have a potential role to play in supporting students in their career choices (Hearne and Galvin 2014; Hearne *et al.* 2016). As found in this study, they can be role models and provide valuable information on the content and study commitments of particular arts related courses. This research found that for two participants, their music teacher provided vital information, encouragement and inspiration in their career choice and role modelled a way of having a career in music.

Working in partnership with guidance counsellors, subject teachers can make a significant contribution to guidance provision in performing arts careers. Furthermore, parents have a role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne *et al.* 2016; McCoy *et al.* 2014). This study found that parents had a direct influence (both positive and negative) on participants' decision-making around a performing arts career. Guidance counsellors could play a role in supporting parents in less familiar career areas, such as the performing arts, by providing information and guidance on professional training and career pathways.

With regards to career guidance in HE, all participants were asked what career support they had availed of as students or after graduating from their undergraduate or postgraduate courses. Two participants referred to inputs they received from industry professionals to their postgraduate programme. These inputs related to theatre directing and performance (one participant) and devising a business plan (second participant). Only one participant referred to availing of Higher Education careers services even though such career supports are available to all students, in some cases for up to a number of years following graduation. These services fall under the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (Hunt 2011) whereby, all HEI's offer a range of career services, both one to one and in groups, in areas such as career and educational consultations, CV review, interview preparation, employability workshops, careers fairs and others (Association for Higher Education Career Services 2016). The marked absence of HE guidance support in participant responses may be attributable to the intervening time since completing post-graduate studies, in some cases 15 years, when careers services may not have been as developed as they are today. However, more recent graduates did not refer to availing of these services either. This finding is somewhat unexpected. The specific reason behind this lack of awareness is unknown and falls beyond the scope of this small-scale study. However, it suggests an opportunity for increased partnership between HE careers services and third level courses in the performing arts to respond to the particular career needs of artists.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a critical discussion on the findings of this research study. It addressed the two main themes that emerged, namely; the nature of careers in the

performing arts, and the lived realities of career development within this sector. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the contribution of postgraduate studies to the career development of performing artists. Chapter 6 will provide overall conclusions and highlight the strengths and limitations of this study. It will also include recommendations relating to policy, practice and research.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of the main findings and the general conclusions in the context of the aim and objectives of this research study. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed and a number of recommendations are put forward relating to policy, practice and research. Researcher reflexivity as a practitioner-researcher will also be discussed as well as personal learning gained.

### **6.1 Summary of Findings**

The overall aim of this research was to explore the topic of career development of performance artists in Ireland. Additionally, a number of objectives were addressed to explore the primary aim. A critical evaluation of literature related to policy, funding and career development was presented. In order to explore the research title in more detail a qualitative approach was adopted, which involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 6 performing arts professionals. In the previous chapter the findings of this research were discussed under two over-arching themes: (i) the nature of careers in the performing arts and (ii) career development of performing artists. A number of key findings emerged from the investigations, which elucidate the nature of career development of performing arts professionals, and these are presented below.

There appear to be some structures in place nationally to support artists career development. However, the realities for individual artists is different. In Ireland, professional development supports are provided by a wide range of arts organisations and arts providers (Bell 2015). European funding programmes also offer career development opportunities for artists which a number of Irish arts organisations and companies are partnered in (Creative Europe 2018). The Arts Council of Ireland supports artists' career development directly, through bursaries, awards, residencies and commissions, and indirectly through funding of arts organisations (Arts Council 2017). This study found a diverse offering of mentoring and professional development initiatives for artists, by different providers. Frequently these providers can cater for only a small number of artists

annually and consequently access is generally through a competitive process. However, this appears to be changing. The Arts Council's 10-year strategic plan reflects the prioritisation of artists' professional development going forward and this is mirrored in funding guidelines and criteria (Arts Council 2018). Nevertheless, an unexpected finding in this study is that in many cases, participants themselves were unaware of career supports available to them. In all cases, participants articulated instances when they did not know how to progress their career, highlighting the need for help in overcoming the difficulties that impede their career decision making (Gati and Levin 2014). This support is all the more important in a career which is unpredictable and demands flexibility from individuals (Krumboltz 2009).

This study highlighted the tension that exists between the perception of a performing arts career as unstable and insecure and regardless of this, performing artists still feel drawn to this career path, with some viewing it as a 'vocation' (Arts Council 2010a). However, the negative perception of this career type by some parents, family, friends, and some guidance counsellors may present an obstacle to those entering the profession. These negative perceptions relate to the precarious nature of this career type, the instability of a performer's career and the fear of not being able to support oneself financially (Beirne *et al.* 2017). This study found that some parents perceive an artistic career as something one does in their 'free time', thereby undervaluing the status of this career type. (Atlas *et al.* 2003). Career decision-making is arguably more complex within professions where work is precarious and career calling is strong (Bennett and Hennekam 2018).

The strong relational influence of parents in terms of performing artists career decision making was an unexpected finding of this study. However, as participants in this study revealed, despite the obstacles and dissuasions, they all eventually entered an arts profession. Sometimes this required a complete career change, demonstrating strong self-efficacy beliefs on behalf of study participants and career resilience (Kidd 2006). Self-fulfilment and wellbeing were also driving factors in participants persistence to pursue their career interests and to enter this profession.

While the experience of career development is unique for all participants, there are similar factors that draw them towards and hold them in their performing arts careers. Intrinsic motivations such as artistic fulfilment and growth, creating something new, and personal satisfaction, meaning and value of their work were all expressed by participants in this study (Savickas 2011b). Equally, extrinsic motivations were reported such as professional validation, the challenge of diverse work opportunities and earning a living (Bridgstock 2012). The study findings suggest that artists generally do not think of their career development process in isolation. Many think more so about artistic and creative development and, on the basis that this aspect is flourishing and progressing, their career will emerge and advance. The highly diversified protean career trajectory requires artists to be self-directed and proactive in navigating their unique career path (Briscoe and Hall 2006). The research findings concur with the protean career construct where artists embraced adaptability and flexibility as they cultivated creatively satisfying and economically sustainable careers (Wysozominski and Chang 2017).

This study has identified that performing artists carve out an individualised career path, unique to each artist, with the individual taking personal responsibility for their own career development. This study finds that career decision making is essentially a solitary activity for performance artists. While artistically competent in their craft, some participants expressed feeling unprepared transitioning from training into professional work and the entrepreneurial and career management aspects of a performer's career. These include areas such as arts sectoral-specific knowledge and their professional networking capability (Bridgstock 2012).

Finally, the research findings indicate that professional and personal networks are an important factor in career development of performance artists. The study found that networking helps build a support structure, thereby creating greater career stability for performance artists. Middleton and Middleton (2017) found that networks can provide a range of benefits, from professional support in career transitions over the lifespan, to providing the emotional support of like-minded people. Findings of this study, concur with this proposition. In the current study, participants drew on formal and informal networks and relationships to carve out their career and reduce professional isolation. Such

networking included drawing on the expertise of other professionals in the field for advice, as well as leaning on fellow artists, former teachers and colleagues for support and career direction. However, the study also found that informal networking can be difficult for some who struggle with social engagement (Zell *et al.* 2014).

## **6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

### **6.2.1 Strengths**

This research study holds a number of key strengths. The career development of creative artists is an under-researched topic, and it is hoped this study will stimulate further scholarly discourse on this career area. A key strength of this study has been the use of an interpretivist approach to explore the actions and lived experience of performing artists (Mertens 2010). This research approach facilitated insight and depth into participant's experiences of developing a performing arts career which may not have emerged in a quantitative study (Cohen *et al.* 2007). Richness was provided through the diversity of experience and career narratives from participants at different career and life stages, working in different art forms, and involved in different roles within the performing arts sector in Ireland. As the researcher works in the arts sector, the participants were very willing to open up about their career experience, and a good rapport was established (Thomas 2013). The researcher's prior knowledge and experience of the arts sector was of benefit in elucidating their career experiences, and the lived reality of participants in this investigation. Additionally, the application of rigour was applied when transcripts of the interviews were sent to be checked by each participant for accuracy of content.

### **6.2.2 Limitations**

The interpretivist approach also has its limitations. Interviews are a personal technique, and while procedures to ensure rigour were utilised by the researcher, bias on a personal level can be an issue in qualitative research (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Bell 2010). However, this was addressed by adopting a rigorous approach and researcher reflexivity throughout the research process (Bryman 2012). As this is a small-scale study, it is difficult to identify conclusive trends in the data. This study captured the perspective of six participants at a period and career stage, which, as this research has identified is fluid and unstable. However, the rich and authentic narratives provided by participants conveyed the full

picture of their experience of developing a career in the performing arts (Punch 2014). Therefore, it is hoped that the findings, while not generalisable, may shed light on the experience of developing and sustaining a career in the performing arts.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study a number of recommendations are offered. These recommendations presented below are not in order of priority.

1. Consideration should be given to expanding the governmental pilot initiative that allows artists access to social welfare supports, to include performance artists. In the expansion of this scheme, a wider debate is needed to include artists, arts providers, Higher Education Institutions, funders and policymakers on the particular career, artistic and financial supports that creative artists need to create satisfying and economically sustainable careers. Consideration of other international models of State supports to artists would be helpful in this process.
2. The study participants all expressed the value of networking to further their artistic and career prospects. It is recommended that artists engage with existing professional networking opportunities. It is further recommended that the Arts Council, as the national body for the arts in Ireland, act as an information point of contact in this regard.
3. It is recommended that the Arts Council conduct a mapping exercise of the various professional development opportunities available to artists and establish a member information portal to share information and best practice. Such a process would assist in capturing the contribution these initiatives make to artist's careers, identify any gaps and duplication in provision, and illuminate best practice in this field.
4. Routes to funding opportunities for artists need to be more visible and user-friendly. In this study, many artists found the funding application processes time consuming, overly complicated and off-putting. It is recommended that the possibility of local authority structures such as Local Enterprise Offices, offer

occasional supports to artists be explored. Such supports could include help in preparing funding applications, mentoring, marketing and website development.

5. Professional career advisors need to be aware of potential bias and pre-conceptions they may hold about a career in the creative arts when guiding young people and adults in their career decision making.
6. From a whole school perspective, guidance counsellors have a key role in informing parents and carers about career options for young people in the creative arts. The contribution of subject teachers, such as music and art, would be valuable here also.
7. It is recommended that increased partnership between HE career services and third level performing arts courses be explored, to offer career management and decision-making supports to students. A number of the study participants felt unprepared for the entrepreneurial self-management aspects of their performance career.
8. It is recommended that a longitudinal research study is conducted on career pathways, supports and obstacles experienced by performance artists in developing and sustaining their career. Up to date information is needed on the living and working conditions of artists in Ireland and the diverse career paths they take in pursuing their artistic goals.
9. It is recommended that a study to examine the contribution of key influencers such as parents and guidance counsellors in early career decision making of creative artists be conducted.

#### **6.4 Reflexivity and Personal Learning**

Research reflexivity is concerned with how the researcher addresses his or her subjective involvement in the process of conducting research (McLeod 2015). The researcher in this study was not detached from this subject area as she has direct experience of forging a

professional career in the arts. Therefore, she came with some insider experience as well as her attitude towards and assumptions of career development in this sector. However, these assumptions were bracketed off as much as possible during this study (Creswell 2009). An approach based on reflexivity was rigorously applied throughout the study. This took the form of discussions with the research supervisor, professional supervision and reflective journaling, the researcher avoided the blurring of boundaries between her professional history and her role as practitioner-researcher. This approach ensured the researcher was challenged to be aware of her views and position while also monitoring these factors (Cohen et al. 2011) Such a reflexive process also helped the researcher to take stock, re-evaluate the direction of the research and plan the steps to move the study forward.

The researcher was humbled by the openness and willingness by participants to share their career story. Their enthusiasm was infectious, and their commitment to the artistic integrity of their work was inspiring. Equally their persistence with their career path, despite the many challenges was striking. Many participants expressed the value they gained in sharing their career story and the opportunity the interview provided to reflect on their career narrative. This feedback from participants was unexpected, however, upon reflection, it is more understandable given the solitary nature of the career type, and the personal investment artists make in their work.

In conducting this research study, the researcher has learned aspects that will help her in her future practice as a guidance counsellor. This study has highlighted the need for the researcher to be aware, on an ongoing basis, of any potential bias towards or away from particular career choices. It reinforced the importance of not influencing clients in their career choice, but rather offering guidance and support to assist them make their own decisions. The researcher is more aware that career decision making is a complex process with many contributing factors to weigh up and potentially conflicting perspectives to consider such as the individual themselves, parents, family and friends. Career paths in the arts, while having many uncertainties, offer significant personal satisfaction and self-fulfilment to those within it.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter concludes this interpretivist study on the topic of career development in the performing arts. It provided an overview of the key findings of the study in the context of the original aim and objectives. It discussed the strengths and limitations of the study and put forward recommendations related to policy, practice and research. Finally, the chapter concluded with a personal reflection on the learning gained by the researcher in the research

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# Appendices

## Appendix A Confirmation of Ethical Approval

From: Anne.O'Brien  
Sent: 29 March 2018 10:17  
To: Lucy.Hearne  
Subject: RE: 2018\_03\_16\_EHS

Dear Lucy

Thank you for your amended Research Ethics application which was recently reviewed by the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

The recommendation of the Committee is outlined below:

Project Title: 2018\_03\_16\_EHS An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals studying at post graduate level in Irish Higher Education.

Principal Investigator: Lucy Hearne

Other Investigators: Majella Perry

Recommendation: Approved until October 2018.

Please note that as Principal Investigator of this project you are required to submit a Research Completion Report Form (attached) on completion of this research study.

Yours Sincerely

Anne O'Brien

Anne O'Brien  
Senior Administrator, Education & Health Sciences  
Research Ethics Committee  
Ollscoil Luimnigh / University of Limerick  
Guthán / Phone +353 61 234101  
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Gréasán / Web: <http://www.ehs.ul.ie>

## Appendix B Subject Information Letter - HE Institution



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### Subject Information Letter (Course Director)

EHS REC no. 2018\_03\_16

**Research title: An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland.**

Dear

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my MA studies.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of career development of postgraduate students in performing arts disciplines. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you would give me consent to carry out the research study with post graduate students on your courses at (name of Institution). This would involve me conducting audio-taped one to one interviews of 45 - 60 minutes duration with volunteer participants (students). If you are agreeable, I would appreciate if you would disseminate a Subject Information Letter and Consent Form to the students currently registered on your programmes. Prospective participants can contact me directly if they are interested in taking part in a research interview.

It is expected that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the career development process for individuals in the performing arts arena. Participants will be drawn from a range of similar postgraduate programmes in the Irish higher education

system. The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. Nonetheless, participation in the study is voluntary and if desired participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to safeguard anonymity. The interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after data analysis according to UL guidelines. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the Institution's name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the Institution will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Majella Perry

Research Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Telephone number: 061-202931

Email: 15067068@studentmail.ul.ie

Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Thank you for considering my request.

Yours sincerely,

Majella Perry

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (**EHSREC No. 2018\_03\_16**). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee**  
**EHS Faculty Office**  
**University of Limerick**  
**Tel (061) 234101**  
**ehsresearchethics@ul.ie**

## Appendix C Consent Form - HE Institution



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### Consent Form (Course Director)

EHS REC no. 2018\_03\_16

#### **Research Title: An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland**

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the identity of the Institution will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Majella Perry to carry out this research in (name of Institution).

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D Subject Information Letter - Arts Organisations



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### Subject Information Letter

**Date:**

**EHS REC no. 2018\_03\_16**

**Research title: An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland.**

Dear

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my MA studies.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland, in particular those who have completed post graduate studies. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you would disseminate a Subject Information Letter and Consent Form to performing artists on your data base of contacts. The research will focus on the unique experiences of developing a career in their chosen art form and the effect of post graduate studies on their career development. The research involves me conducting audio-taped one to one interviews of 45 - 60 minutes duration with volunteer participants (performing artists). Prospective participants can contact me directly if they are interested in taking part in a research interview.

It is expected that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the career development process for individuals in the performing arts arena. Participants will be

drawn from the art forms theatre, dance, music and singing. The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. Nonetheless, participation in the study is voluntary and if desired participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to safeguard anonymity. The interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after data analysis according to UL guidelines. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the name of the individual participants and your organisation will not be used in the research.

If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Majella Perry

Research Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Telephone number: 061-202931

Email: 15067068@studentmail.ul.ie

Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Thank you for considering my request.

Yours sincerely,

Majella Perry

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (**EHSREC No. 2018\_03\_16**). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee**  
**EHS Faculty Office**  
**University of Limerick**  
**Tel (061) 234101**  
**ehsresearchethics@ul.ie**

## Appendix E Consent Form - Arts Organisations



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### Consent Form

EHS REC no. 2018\_03\_16

**Research title: An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland.**

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the identity of the organisation will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Majella Perry to carry out this research with volunteers on the contact list of (organisation).

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F Participant Subject Information Letter – HE Institution



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### Subject Information Letter (Research Participant)

**Date :**

**EHSREC no. 2018\_03\_16**

**Research title: An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland.**

Dear Student,

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of career development for postgraduate students in performing arts disciplines in Ireland. I am particularly interested in hearing about their unique experiences of developing a career in their chosen art form and what has drawn them to post graduate studies at this stage in their career. In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio-taped interview with me on the topic. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you. Conducting the interview via Skype is also an option if this is more convenient for you.

It is expected that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the career development process for individuals in the performing arts arena. Participants will be drawn from a range of similar postgraduate programmes in the Irish higher education system. The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. Nonetheless, participation in the study is voluntary and if desired participants can withdraw from the

research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to safeguard anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after the analysis process. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name and the Institution's name will not be used in the reporting of the research and the Institution will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

Thank you for considering my request to participate in this research study. If you wish to take part I would be grateful if you would contact me by (date) to arrange an interview. If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Majella Perry

Research Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Telephone number: 061-202931

Email: 15067068@studentmail.ul.ie

Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (**EHSREC 2018\_03\_16**). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
EHS Faculty Office  
University of Limerick  
Tel (061) 234101  
ehsresearchethics@ul.ie**

## **Appendix G      Participant Subject Information Letter – Arts Organisations**



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**  
**OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH**

### **Information Letter (Research Participant)**

**Date :**

**EHSREC no. 2018\_03\_16**

**Research title: An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland.**

Dear research participant,

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland, in particular those who have completed post graduate studies. I am particularly interested in hearing about their unique experiences of developing a career in their chosen art form and the effect of post graduate studies on their career development. In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio-taped interview with me on the topic. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you. Conducting the interview via Skype is also an option if this is more convenient for you.

It is expected that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the career development process for individuals in the performing arts arena. Participants will be drawn from the art forms theatre, dance, music and singing. The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. Nonetheless, participation in the study is voluntary and if desired participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to safeguard anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after the analysis process. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the reporting of the research and the Institution you studied at will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

Thank you for considering my request to participate in this research study. If you wish to take part I would be grateful if you would contact me by (date) to arrange an interview. If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Majella Perry

Research Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Telephone number: 061-202931

Email: 15067068@studentmail.ul.ie

Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSREC 2018\_03\_16). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee**  
**EHS Faculty Office**  
**University of Limerick**  
**Tel (061) 234101**  
**ehsresearchethics@ul.ie**

## Appendix H      Consent Form – Research Participant



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### Consent Form (Research Participant)

**EHS REC no. 2018\_03\_16**

**Research Title: An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland.**

- I understand what this research project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of the procedures and of the risks and the benefits of the study.
- I am fully aware that the recording of the interview and the data generated from it will be kept confidential.
- I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
- I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I Interview Framework



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

### Research Title:

**An exploratory study of the career development of performing arts professionals in Ireland.**

### Interview Framework Questions (45 – 60 minutes)

#### Section 1: Early Career Decisions and Influences

1. Tell me about yourself and where your interest in drama/music/dance first began?
2. At what stage did you begin to consider performing arts as a career option?
3. Tell me about what/who influenced you to choose this career path? What role did parental/family support play in your decision?
4. Tell me about the type of guidance you received in school.
5. Did you have any hesitations about embarking on this career path?

#### Section 2: Career Development as a New Graduate

6. Tell me about beginning your professional life after undergraduate studies. Has it been easy to find paid work in your professional area? Did you do unpaid work in your field? How did you support yourself financially?
7. Can you describe what career supports were available to you after your undergraduate studies? Has it been easy or difficult to gain a foot hold in your discipline?
8. Describe the types of challenges you have encountered in developing your career in the early stages (*such as insecure/short term contracts, gender issues, bias*)? How did you overcome these challenges?
9. What types of opportunities and supports were you able to tap into (*funding streams, resource organisations locally & nationally, key individuals*)? Where did you draw your support from?

### **Section 3: The Effect of Post Graduate Studies on Career Development**

10. Describe the type of work you are currently involved in? Has this changed as your career progressed? What influenced that change?
11. Why did you decide to undertake post graduate studies at this stage? What was your motivation/influence?
12. What has been the effect of the studies on your professional practice? And on you personally?
13. What career support is available to you now as a post graduate student?
14. How do you think your post graduate studies will help you on your career path?

### **Section 4: General - Career Development in the Performing Arts**

15. What do you understand by the term 'career development'? Is this a term commonly used in the performing arts?
16. What are the benefits of this type of career?
17. Do you believe it is possible to sustain a full-time career in the performing arts?
18. Do you have any regrets about your career choice in the performing arts? What regrets (if any) and why? Would you still make the same career choice if you had your time over?
19. What types of personal qualities do you believe are necessary to sustain a career in the performing arts?
20. Do you believe that one's gender may encourage or hinder progress in their professional field?
21. How do you feel about your future in this field?
22. In your view, is the performing arts sector sufficiently funded and supported by the state?
23. From your experience what career advice would you give to someone entering the performing arts?

## Appendix J Interview Transcript Excerpts and Codes

**Interviewer:** Researcher

**Interviewee:** Study Participant

### Excerpt 1

Interviewer: And then you moved from there into (name of course)

Interviewee: Yeah, I dropped out after a year of that. Again, I was thinking of going down the road of, oh this is something that's intelligent. The more I come to know myself, and that's the greatest, sort of, gift of working in a performance art, anything in the arts, you get so much time with yourself you get to know yourself a lot better. And you're not putting all your energy into something else, someone else's dream or someone else's company. There's no way I could ever work a 9 – 5 for a company. I've tried a couple of part time performance jobs, and even then, and they're pretty difficult.

**Code:** Unhappy with original course choice. Developed increased self-awareness and awareness of his personal career goals. Personal motivation. Traditional work format has no appeal.

### Excerpt 2

Interviewer: How do you feel about your future in the performing arts?

Interviewee: Today I'm feeling very well. And it always changes. Because it is dependent upon what work you've coming in and I'm lucky at the moment. I've a job tomorrow morning. I have a job at the end of the month for two months. And I'm going to enjoy those an awful lot. I'm looking forward to that. Last month, or last week even, I got rejected from two different jobs and I wasn't so happy and I was looking up going back into doing teaching in Maynooth.

**Code:** Positive optimistic outlook. Instability and unpredictability of a performing arts career. Difficulty of dealing with rejection. Doubting his career choice.

### Excerpt 3

Interviewer: I'm wondering where you drew your support from during that phase.

Interviewee: Yeah. Social welfare was one, as a support. I started working as a tour guide straight away and gradually, I was just auditioning. I did a couple of Shakespeare for schools that we did. I did a couple of smaller plays with actors and directors I have come to know in and around the scene in Dublin. Small scale stuff, very up and coming. Unpaid, profit share stuff. It was a case of just sticking at it. I guess, support....other actors, in terms of how are you doing this, how are you doing that? Then

getting an agent helped in terms of support. I got representation by (name of agent), who isn't a huge agent by any means, but it was down the right career path.

**Code:** Managing a diverse portfolio of work. Supports - networking, fellow professionals and social welfare. Unreliable income flow. Persistence and resilience to find his career path.

#### **Excerpt 4**

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, I'm very wary of people filling others with false hope. And saying, 'yeah, follow your dreams, you can do it'. Performing arts is something that won't pay you enough to get a mortgage. If that's your idea of success, then don't work in the arts. If you don't think mortgages are a good idea and you don't want to own a really massive house, or a brand-new car, and you don't find luxury items bring you happiness, then you're probably going to be more suited to the arts.

**Code:** Cautious. Need for honesty about this career type. Harsh reality of unstable income flow.

#### **Excerpt 5**

Interviewee: There's much more facilities for performers, for young artists now. There's more there now than when I was going to college and contemplating college. But then again, I was always rooted to my father's thing of having a stable career. That was always the case of what you do to get a job and then you can do your hobbies part time. You need to get a career so what career can you possibly do.

**Code:** Improved opportunities for performing arts careers. Parental expectations and influence. The pressure to pursue a stable career.