

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**SABBATICAL REPORT**

**SOFT SKILLS AND MUSIC GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: BETWEEN CURRICULUM  
AND THE WORLD OF WORK**

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**2014**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to express my utmost thanks to Universiti Teknologi MARA for granting me permission to conduct a study which has become a subject of interest not only to us at the Faculty of Music but also to the university as a whole. The year's leave has provided me with the time to reflect and evaluate the core issues of providing education in the field of music. Thank you too to PM Dr Ramona Mohd. Tahir, Dean of the Faculty of Music for giving me permission to be away from work, despite being short of staff, for much needed time to conduct this study which I am sure will benefit the whole faculty in the long run.

My thanks also go to Prof Dr Dawn Bennett, of Curtin University, Perth, Australia for her patience and gracious time and effort to collaborate with me as a mentor in conducting a study which is close to her heart. Although the time spent discussing and looking at the issues at hand in Malaysia was brief, her guidance is much appreciated. The knowledge gained will certainly continue to further studies in this area which provides a lot of possibilities for exploration in the near future.

Last but not least, my love and appreciation goes to my husband, children and ever devoted mother for their support and encouragement throughout the year's sabbatical leave. For without them, I would surely not have been able to complete this study.

## ABSTRACT

In line with many other countries, in Malaysia the growing demand for more employable graduates from institutions of higher learning (IHL) has prompted the development of a blueprint for graduate employability (Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). The blueprint, which outlines desired graduate attributes for the year 2012 – 2017, hopes to inspire all IHLs to emphasise for each field and profession both the 'hard' or professional skills and the 'soft' or generic skills. Music programs at colleges and universities in Malaysia are not excluded from this blueprint; indeed, as the world of work in music is highly challenging and competitive there is increasing recognition that more effort is needed in order to prepare music graduates for careers in music. As a result, programs are under pressure to become more relevant to the conditions and characteristics of the music industry and to develop aware, marketable and employable music graduates. This study reports on an in-depth study with eight Malaysian music professionals, all higher education music graduates, who reported in detail on their process of transition from university to work. Their journeys towards and within the world of music work is shared with the aim of emphasizing the attributes necessary for music graduates to acquire and sustain work. Participants indicated that the development of both hard and soft skills is equally important to sustaining work in music.

Keywords: graduate employability, music, soft skills, generic skills, curriculum, transition

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Hard skills* -- Hard skills are teachable abilities or skill sets that are easy to quantify and observe. Hard skills are specific, teachable abilities that are based on facts such as qualifications, ability to play an instrument, type, operate machinery, etc. It is related to professional knowledge, tools or techniques that allow us to function within our profession. It often comes as a result of training.

*Music practitioner* -- A term used to refer to people involved in music, practices music related occupations or activities and are active in fields related to music. This includes musicians, composers, music producers, music directors, music teachers/educators/trainers,

*Musician* -- Refers to an individual who play a music instrument and is directly or indirectly involved in the performance of music whether alone or in a group.

*Soft skills* -- Soft skills are subjective and are often associated with personal attributes and character. Some examples include dependability, sincerity, motivation, time management, sense of responsibility, organizational skills, reliability, honesty, communication skills, team work, empathy, creativity, and many more.

*Stakeholder* -- A person, group or organization that has interest or concern in an organization, profession or establishment. Stakeholders may include employers, suppliers, customers, managers or anyone with a functional or financial interest in the product or situation.

# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Music education programs at universities and colleges, are tasked with the responsibility to prepare students for various careers in music and the real life of work in the music industry. Studies by Bennett (2007) and Barkl (2008) emphasized the concerns about university training and preparing of graduates for the changing and dynamic demands of the world of music. Specifically, the concern is that curricula must be relevant and programs must provide a realistic "link between industry and the education of artists" (Bennett, 2007, p.181). University programs thus often come under the scrutiny of policy and decision makers about how 'current' or relevant they are and most importantly how are they preparing graduates and ensuring that they are marketable and employable upon leaving university.

Music graduates have the challenge of not only training and building on their music skills but they also need to learn and cultivate extra skills that would help them to be marketable and successful in their careers. As with all other professions especially those which are skill-based, careers in music are challenging and highly competitive in nature. The possession of talent and good sound background and knowledge in music is often thought sufficient for musicians to earn a living. Often, the thought of luck, opportunities and personal issues such as good character and personality never occurred as important factors in the minds of music students until they graduate and face the reality of finding work and earning an income.

Therefore, the training of university students in their chosen fields and helping them to attain the technical or hard skills of future professions are the core business of all universities. However, as the world of work becomes more demanding and saturated with other graduates from so many colleges and universities the acquisition of hard skills and training in the chosen fields are now insufficient to guarantee

employment. Employers often do not only look at the paper qualifications of prospective employees. As applicants are abundant, employers now have the luxury of choice. Criteria of desired employees are often in the minds of employers, and often it is the unwritten aspect of the potential employee that may very well secure them the job after the interview or face to face contact. Thus the issue of a person's personal attributes and character has become an equally important criteria for successful employment.

As employers and stakeholders look for the best candidate to fill vacancies for their organizations, those who are able to present themselves well during the face-to-face meeting or interview would have the edge above others. Good, effective communication skills and the ability to interact well with potential employers are important and are looked upon as an asset. These personal qualities such as the ability to communicate well, interact, think creatively and having a pleasant and positive personality are considered to be important criteria for all job applicants in whatever field or discipline. In short, musicians, music graduates and other graduates in the entertainment and arts industries are not excluded from this.

### **Problem Statement**

Musical training involves many hours of practice which involves the challenging task of acquiring technical knowledge and other hard skills in music. However, practical training and skills in music is not the only factor that determines the success of the music practitioner (musicians, music directors, conductors, composers, concert masters, music producers, arrangers and music teachers). Skills in music refer to the dexterity, technical and performing ability of a musician, their knowledge in the theoretical and practical aspects of music performing, music teaching, music composition, and all activities related to music. These skills are often called "hard skills", which according to Nikitina and Furuoka (2012) are "described as mostly

technical in nature and referring to human ability to perform a task and require new knowledge” (p. 211). Hard skills are also the knowledge that an individual acquires and is measurable in terms of the extent of achievement or attainment of that knowledge.

On the other hand, other skills or characteristics that also reflect the worth or value of an individual are the ‘soft skills’ or generic skills which enhance the individual. Terms which describe soft skills often vary. According to Nikitina and Furuoka (2012) these skills may be referred to in various terms or labels such as “employability skills, social skills, interpersonal skills, core skills, key skills, and even competencies” (p. 211). Soft skills have often been considered to enable individuals to be better employed. In some cases, soft skills may even be considered to be more important than paper qualifications as it defines their ‘hidden’ attitudes and personal attributes. As graduates are not assured of securing good, well-paying jobs according to their qualifications, they now need to have the extra qualities that potential employers look for. This aspect now pose as a challenge for the music graduate as they now not only need to have a certain level of professional skill and training in music, but they also need to develop within themselves some personal attributes that would give them the edge over other graduates.

In the field of music, attributes such as discipline, attention to detail, sense of responsibility, perseverance, interest in lifelong learning, critical thinking skills, creativity, punctuality, time management skills, self-confidence, respect and tolerance for others, communication skills and team spirit to name but a few are some desirable attributes for musicians and music practitioners to have. While at university the way students communicate with their peers and lecturers, how they interact and collaborate with fellow musicians while performing and preparing for performances, how they solve problems related to their music and their performance, how they show leadership skills and display sense of responsibility, commitment and attention to

their work, how they display ethically correct behavior during practice, rehearsals and performances as well as many more desirable attributes can determine their potential for success in their careers in music.

Since the possession of soft skills is a very important criterion not only to build and sustain a career but also to achieve overall success in life, knowing what future employers, music professionals, music practitioners and stake holders want from music graduates is important. Thus feedback from these professionals and employers in the music industry could help provide a better understanding for what is expected of the music graduate and the desired attributes and characteristics of job seekers in music. This would help avoid speculations and assumptions about what music graduates should be like and help universities to align their music programs to what is required of the music professional and the reality of work in music. However since the measurement of soft skills acquisition is a difficult one as it is subjective and differs from discipline to discipline, the issues surrounding soft skills and graduate employability in the music field is of much interest to tertiary level music programs.

This study therefore aims to investigate the range of soft skills important in the field of music from the perspective of employers, music specialists, professionals and stakeholders in the music industry. Feedback from experts, professionals and alumni in the music performance, music teaching, and music business areas would be valuable in helping to understand how to make music graduates more marketable and employable in their chosen specialities.

## **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To describe music professionals' perception of important transition experiences from university to the world of work which helped them in their career in music.
- 2) To identify soft skills attributes necessary among music practitioners as expected by professionals in the music field as well as the music industry.

## **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the transition experiences of music professionals which helped in their careers after university?
- 2) What are the soft skills attributes necessary among musicians as expected by practitioners in the music industry?

## **Limitations of the Study**

The study is focused on the perceived desired attributes and qualities of music graduates from the perspective of music professionals in the music industry in Malaysia. These experts in the field who may be the stakeholders, employers and practitioners who come into contact with various music graduates from the many colleges, universities and other training bodies in the country have the necessary working knowledge regarding essential attributes necessary to be successful in the music industry. Sample for the study were selected among those who had tertiary music qualifications and who were willing to share their experiences for the study.

## **Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the findings from this project will provide a clearer understanding of the desired attributes of music graduates as perceived by the different stakeholders in the Malaysian music industry. Knowing how music professionals perceive the importance of soft skills for the survival and success of musicians would help in improving the curriculum design for the various music programs at tertiary level.

This project will also assist with subsequent follow up research projects as well as assist in the design of a Music Soft Skills Inventory (MuSSI) that could be used to gather evidence of music students' self-perceived readiness for careers in music. This could then be used for triangulation of music curriculums in higher education institutions (HEI) and provide a source of information for future curriculum reviews and outcome based education assessments.

## **Summary**

Surviving and making a success of a career in music requires not only passion for the field but also many other qualities and characteristics in a person. Desired traits and attributes of aspiring musicians, music teachers, conductors, composers, music producers, leaders of bands and ensembles, music technologists, event managers, publishers and many more are felt and experienced first-hand by the people in contact with them throughout the course of their work. The fact that colleges, universities and academies are churning out musically trained students for various music occupations not only in the country but throughout the world creates a concern as to whether the curriculum offered for the various diplomas or degrees offered are in line with what is expected by the industry. A study that looks at the various dimensions of soft skills perceived as necessary for all music practitioners to have is important in light of the ever changing, dynamic and competitive world of music. Subsequently, in order for tertiary level music curriculum to be relevant to the

demands of the industry and the expectations of various stakeholders in the field, clarification regarding what music graduates should be like is necessary.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As the discussion of soft skills and its relation to employability revolves around many issues including education and career preparation, a description of the issues concerning graduate preparation for the world of work is needed to help provide an understanding of how the issue of employability and graduate preparation is addressed in other parts of the world. A discussions of the scenario of education as well as music education in Malaysia provides a background of the circumstances from which music graduates come from and later of subsequent graduate preparation in the various music programs offered at the Faculty of Music, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

#### **Setting the Context: Education in Malaysia**

A discussion of education in Malaysia from primary to tertiary level is put forward in this section as it is deemed necessary for the understanding of the educational background of students entering tertiary level music programs in Malaysia. A discussion of the music education practices and scenario in Malaysia follows to describe the formal and informal music education situation in this country.

#### **Brief Glance of Education Policies**

Education in Malaysia from post-independence (after the British occupation) was focused towards the issue of vernacular education for the three major ethnic groups which make up the population. Various discussions addressed the needs for specific education for the population in the country (Malays, Chinese and Indians), and culminated in many reports. For example, the Barnes Report (1951), the Fenn-Wu Report (1952) and the Razak Report (1956) proposed a curriculum that reflected the educational needs of the three major ethnic groups residing in the country. The

Razak Report proposed one common school system for all which included a centralized curriculum and school examination, with Malay and English as a compulsory subject. A subsequent report in 1960 (The Rahman Talib Report) proposed Malay as the main language in schools and free secondary school education. The Education Act (1961) later elaborated in more detail the levels of education (primary and secondary) to be provided. Later, the Hussein Report (1971) and the Mahathir Report (1979) subsequently focused on improving the overall education system for the main purpose of producing a knowledgeable and skilled Malaysian society.

The National Philosophy of Education (1989) declared that Malaysian education would develop the “potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner” which aims to produce citizens “who are knowledgeable and competent” (MOE, 2013, p.E-4). The Education Act of 1996 then consolidated the National education aspirations. A five system aspiration for the Malaysian education system was designed with the purpose of setting the stage for the improvement of the Malaysian education system, which comprised of the journey from preschool to higher education.

This journey from preschool to secondary education, comprising of 12 years, and then further on to higher education in Malaysia is illustrated in Figure 1 where it is clearly mapped by the Ministry of Education. Post-secondary education after Form 5 may differ between individuals who may opt for another two years (Form 6) or proceed on to college or pre-university levels (Diploma, matriculation) before pursuing fields of interest.

## The Malaysian Education Journey

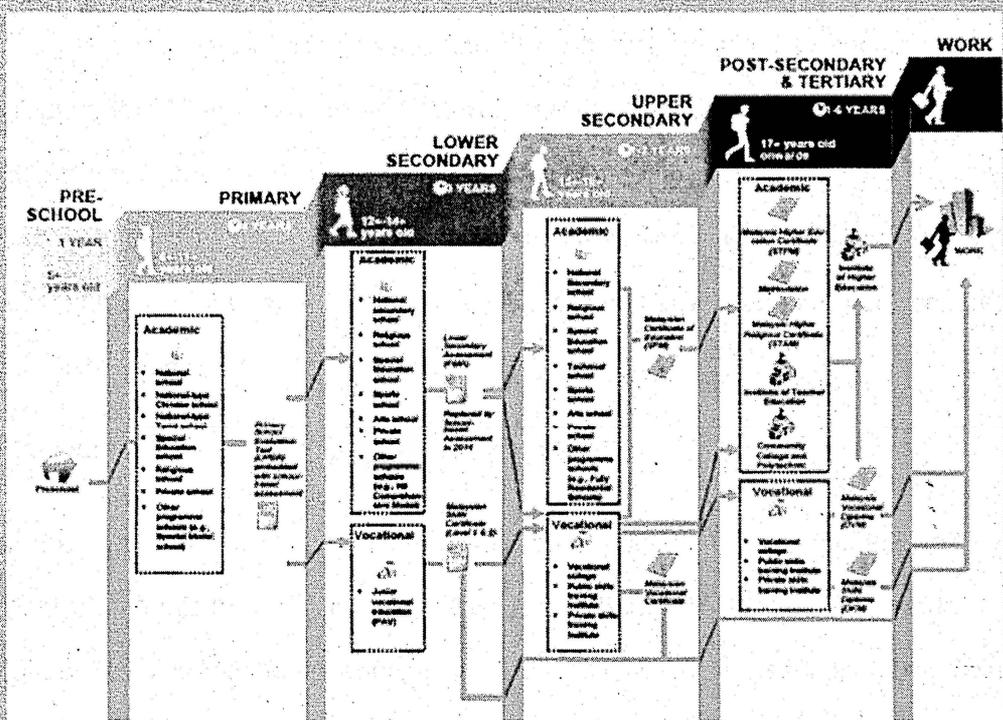


Figure 1: The Malaysian Education Journey

(Source: Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2013. *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education, p. 7-2)*)

Increasing challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century labour market as well as a general concern for employability among Malaysian youth spurred the MOE to review the school curriculum. One of the complaints addressed by the Ministry was that the Malaysian education system was too exam oriented. Public obsession about academic achievement and excellence in the various national exams (UPSR and PMR), even more so in the Malaysian School Certificate examination (SPM) held at the end of Form Five (the final year of high school) had reached the point at which schooling seem to overlook the development of personal skills and attributes in favour of academic achievement (MOE, 2013).

Scrutiny of the school curriculum led to numerous discussions and research projects regarding the importance of developing soft skills among school students

(Mohamad, 2014; Abas & Koi, 2014). Alongside this came recognition that higher education students needed to develop the soft skills required to secure work after graduation (Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim & Raphael, 2012; Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). Interest in the issue of soft skills also came into public view, with discussions on television talk shows, forums and morning television segments stressing the need for Malaysian children and youth to develop the soft skills needed to be prepared for future job markets.

### **Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025**

In the year 2011, a review of the Malaysian education system was initiated by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) in an attempt to address the needs of pre-school to post-secondary education. This review which was conducted over 15 months (from October 2011 to December 2012) aimed to examine the curriculum from primary to secondary school and culminated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025. The MEB states that the “objective of any education system is to ensure that its students are being equipped with the knowledge and skills required for success in life” (MEB, 2013, p. E-4). In addition, the blueprint also stressed that “a solid combination of knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics and spirituality, and national identity are critical in preparing students to succeed and thrive in an increasingly globalized world” (MEB, 2013, p. 2-8).

Using the blueprint, the Ministry proposed to transform the country’s education system over the following twelve years via “11 strategic and operational shifts” (MOE, p. E-1). This included inculcation of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) among secondary school students to produce a younger generation better able to function in society as competent workforce. (See Figure 2).



Figure 2: The Malaysian education transformation plan of 11 shifts  
 (Source: MOHE, 2012, p. E-15)

The biggest issue arising from this blueprint is the newly implemented secondary school-based assessment system specifically for Form Three students (aged 15 years), called PT3, which was administered recently in October 2014. This nationwide exam contains not only the usual written assessments alongside a listening and speaking component for the Malay and English language, but a project-based component for two subjects (History and Geography), and an additional psychometric test that is administered to all 450,000 Form Three students in Malaysia at that time (data from the Malaysian Examination Syndicate, MOE, 2014). The psychometric test, designed to determine students' inclinations and personality traits, is a new addition and is used to channel students into streams during the upper secondary school years (the final two years of school (Form Four and Five). The main aim of this new assessment restructure and redesign is to produce school leavers (after Form Five) who possess better communication skills, leadership skills, bilingual language proficiency, self-confidence, adaptability, self-esteem, problem solving and critical thinking skills, in addition to having a better sense of independence and responsibility towards their own learning. As summarised by

Mohamad (2014, p. 3), “we want our children to have those skills as early as possible so that they can maximize their potential earlier”.

### **Higher Education Plan**

Since the past ten years, Malaysians, from policy makers, educators to stakeholders and employers have been increasingly concerned about the quality of candidates applying into higher education at universities and colleges. The education at secondary level seemed to have shown certain weaknesses and deficiencies in the curriculum which did not seem to be able to prepare school leavers with adequate knowledge and skills for higher education and future career training. Of utmost concern was the language proficiencies of applicants which became even more pronounced at tertiary level.

As Malaysia aspire to be an education hub, more private and public higher education institutions appeared and began offering a myriad of programs and courses. This resulted in mass training of Malaysian youth. According to Nikitina and Furuoka (2012), “the consequences of the massification of higher education are the changing functions of tertiary education and the changing patterns of graduate employment” (p. 208). This statement points to the fact that the high number of university graduates each year would indicate that they would no longer be “assured of getting well-paid jobs according to their qualifications upon graduation” (p. 208). This also indicate that the rate of graduate unemployment would also be equally high, thus prompting the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to instruct all institutions of higher learning (IHL) to conduct surveys of all their graduates to see their employability rate six months after graduating.

### **The National Graduate Employability Blueprint (GEB), 2012-2017**

The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) defined employability and employment in order to indicate the difference between the two important terms in the

context of work. They defined employment as “the potential to secure a job at a workplace”. On the other hand, employability is “defined as the potential to secure, maintain and grow in a particular job at the workplace” (MOHE, 2012, p. 3). However, MOHE adopted Mantz and Yorke’s definition of employability as, “a set of achievements: skills, understanding and personal attributes, that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Mantz & Yorke, 2006).

In order to have a better perspective of the quality of graduates leaving higher education institutions a blueprint was co-designed by a team of academics and industry experts whose focus was higher education graduate employability and the development of transferable skills. This blueprint, called the *Graduate Employability Blueprint (GEB)*, was the product of roundtable discussions, dialogues and workshops focussed on addressing what is required for graduates to secure and sustain employment.

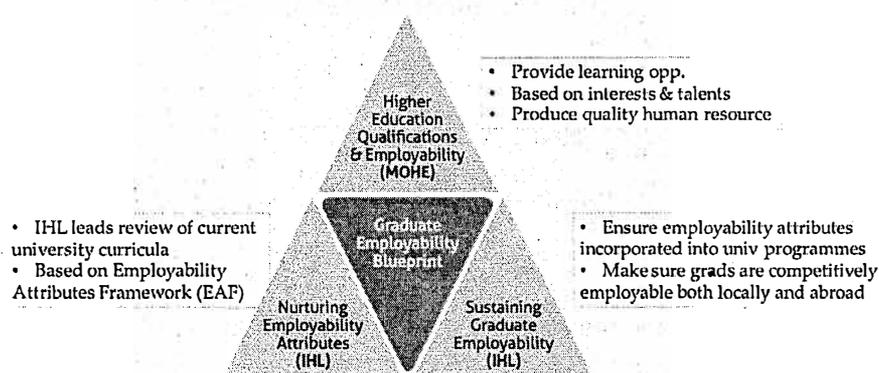


Figure 3: Core components of the GEB

(Source: *The Ministry of Higher Education (2012). The National Graduate Employability Blueprint: 2012-2017, p. 22*)

Many complaints from employers and stakeholders centred on “deficiencies seen in the areas of communication, ICT knowledge, and professional and technical skills”, which according to the ministry is “further aggravated by university students

not pursuing fields of study that are relevant to industry" (MOHE, 2012, p. 1). Figure 4 below illustrates some of the results of the study done by the GEB team in investigating what attributes are lacking among Malaysian graduates applying into job markets in Malaysian society.

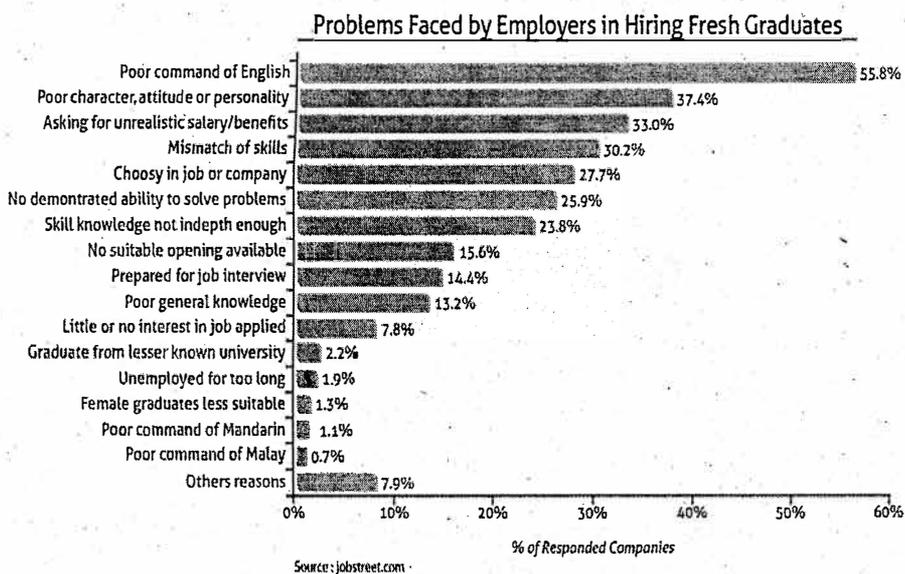


Figure 4: Problems faced by employers in hiring fresh graduates  
 (Source: The Ministry of Higher Education (2012). *The National Graduate Employability Blueprint: 2012-2017*, p. 9)

However, whilst the GEB addressed employability in the arts and social sciences, it failed to specifically look at the challenging and dynamic fields of music and the performing arts, whose graduates face distinct and as yet unmet challenges to employability. This lack of inclusion appeared to be a result of poor representation from the arts and social science experts during the discussions, with no representative from the performing arts and music. This has contributed to the lack of discussions and considerations to music related issues in the blueprint.

An Employability Attributes Framework (EAF) was designed to describe the desired generic student attributes that need to be cultivated in all Malaysian

graduates (see Figure 5). This framework divides the desired attributes into four: academic, personality, exploration and connectivity attributes.

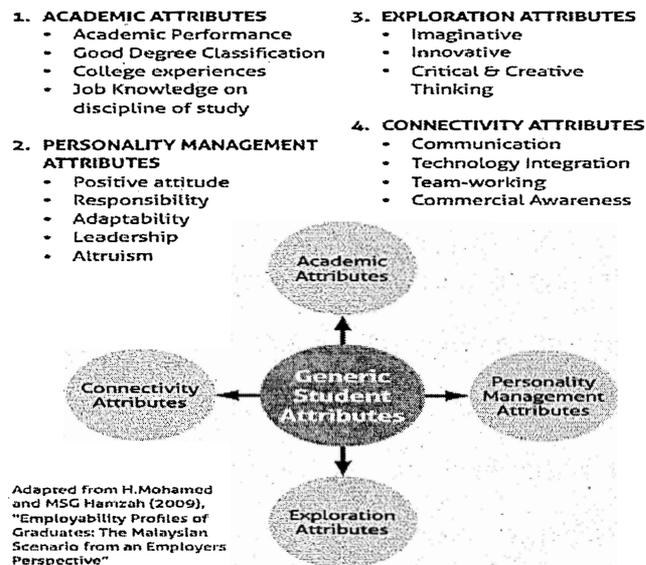


Figure 5: Employability Attributes Framework (EAF)  
(Source: MOHE, 2012, p. 21)

In order to achieve the attributes stated in the Employability Attributes Framework, MOHE published a module to be followed by all IHL, called the *Soft skills development module for Malaysian institutions of higher learning* (2006). The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) defined soft skills as “generic skills which include cognitive elements related to non-academic abilities, such as positive values, leadership, teamwork, communication and lifelong learning” (MOHE, 2006, p. 5). In this module 34 soft skills were identified that university students are expected to acquire during their years at university. These 34 soft skills were intended to be incorporated into the university curricula and designed into the teaching and learning of the various academic disciplines as well as co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The 34 soft skills identified were divided into two categories: 18 “must have” and 16 “good to have skills”. Salih (2008) mentioned the fact that students must

strive to also equip themselves with the 'good to have' skills apart from the 'must have' skills. For example, she mentioned that the 'must have' soft skills are the core skills that students must acquire in their various fields, of which without them they would be regarded as incompetent. These must have skills, although are generic in nature but are considered transferable, necessary and applicable across all disciplines and fields of knowledge.

On the other hand, the 'good to have' soft skills are additional skills and can be considered to be a bonus to the development and training to be professional. These 'good to have' soft skills may be described to be additional but for some fields and disciplines, they may be the criteria or characteristic being sought by the stakeholder which may just be the decision maker for employment. For example, when two applicants have the same academic qualifications, the successful one who gets the job may just be the one who can communicate better or who carries himself or herself with confidence and shows good leadership potential.

A description of each of the soft skills mentioned in the MOHE blueprint subdivided into two sub-categories of 'must have' and 'good to have' skills are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: 'Must have' and 'good to have' soft skills by the Ministry of Higher Education

No	Soft skills	Must have	Good to have
1	Communication skills	Ability to deliver ideas clearly, effectively and with confidence either orally or in writing. Ability to present clearly and confidently to the audience. Ability to practice active listening skills and respond.	Ability to use technology during presentation. Ability to expand one's own communicative skill. Ability to discuss and arrive at consensus. Ability to communicate with individuals from different cultural background. Ability to use non-oral skills.
2	Critical thinking & problem solving skills	Ability to identify and analyze problems in difficult situations and make justifiable evaluations. Ability to expand and improve thinking skills such as	Ability to think beyond. Ability to make conclusion based on valid proof. Ability to withstand and give full responsibility.

		explanation, analysis and evaluate discussion. Ability to find ideas and look for alternative solutions.	Ability to understand and give full responsibility. Ability to understand and accomodate oneself to the varied working environment.
3	Teamwork skills	Ability to build good rapport, interact and work effectively with others. Ability to understand and play the role of a leader and follower alternatively. Ability to recognize and respect other's attitude, behaviour and beliefs.	Ability to give contribution to the planning and coordinate group work. Responsible towards group decision.
4	Leadership skills	Knowledge of the basic theories of leadership. Ability to lead a project.	Ability to understand and take turns as a leader and follower alternatively Ability to supervise members of a group
5	Ethics, moral and professional skills	Ability to understand the economy crisis, environment and social cultural aspects professionally. Ability to analyze and make problem solving decisions related to ethics.	Ability to practice ethical attitudes besides having the responsibility towards society.
6	Lifelong learning & information management skills	Ability to find an manage relevant information from various sources. Ability to receive new ideas and perform autonomy learning.	Ability to develop an inquiry mind and seek knowledge.
7	Entrepreneurship skills	Ability to identify job opportunities	Ability to propose business opportunities. Ability to build, explore and seek business opportunities and jobs. <u>Ability to be self-employed.</u>

Source: MOHE, 2006; Salih, 2008.

These skills were then further separated into seven areas (MOHE, 2006, p. 9-13):

1. Communication skills
2. Critical thinking and problem solving skills
3. Team work
4. Lifelong learning and information management skills
5. Entrepreneurship skills
6. Ethics and professional moral skills
7. Leadership skills

## Implementation of soft skills at institutes of higher learning (IHL)

The MOHE module published in 2006 designed a model showing how the soft skills development could be implemented at all IHLs. As seen in Figure 6, the model suggests three approaches where IHLs may help develop soft skills among students.

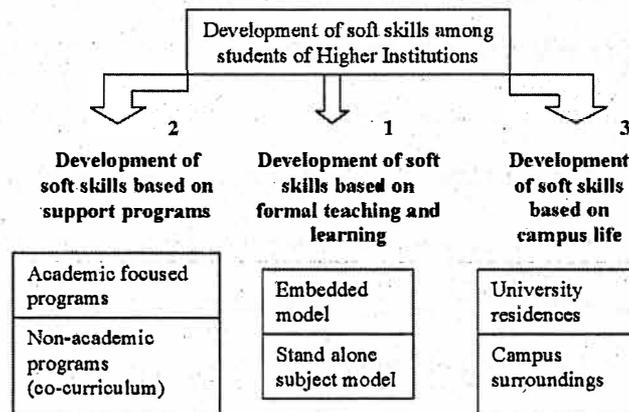


Figure 6: MOHE model for implementation of soft skills in IHLs

(Source: MOHE, 2006, p. 15.)

Referring to the model, the development of soft skills could either be through a stand-alone subject or by embedding the development of soft skills in the existing courses offered at faculties and universities. Faculties choosing to develop student soft skills through stand-alone subjects can elect to include it in as elective subjects which can be taken by students in any semester. However, since they are electives students may still opt not to take it in preference for other subjects or courses they are more interested in (Shakir, 2009). On the other hand, if the development of soft skills is embedded into existing university courses, the chances of students having the opportunity to explore and develop their soft skills are there as they are required to take those courses anyway. This second option however requires all lecturers to be involved in the planning and implementation of the soft skills elements. Teaching styles, assessment methods and student centred approaches should be carefully

integrated into the teaching and learning processes. Shakir (2009) mentioned that traditional teaching methods should be replaced with more interactive approaches such as “problem-based learning, case study, and other teaching and learning techniques such as presentations and group work” (p. 312).

Apart from the development of soft skills in the courses offered, universities and faculties may also use activities such as seminars, workshops and non-academic programs or support programs such as co-curricular activities to get students to be involved in hands-on participation. Other possible avenues for soft skills development may be in the industrial attachment, field experiences, social services projects and other faculty programs where students perform and participate in. All these activities provide ample opportunities for lecturers to evaluate their students and for students to develop and realize the importance of having soft skills. As stated by Shakir (2009), “apart from gaining practical experience, students will realize the importance of possessing a certain level of soft skills as they have an “early preview” of what is expected of them” (p. 313). This is also another opportunity for students to discover certain aspects about their own personalities, strengths or weaknesses within themselves that can be explored further.

A study by Devadason, Subramaniam and Daniel (2010) however found that “not all the skills were adequately or equally well integrated into the coursework and professional training programs offered by the universities” (p. 209). This is because as the soft skills development was a ‘top-down’ approach, the incorporation of soft skills elements required a bit of time to be included into the various curricula. Intensive curriculum reviews needed to be done and feedback from stakeholders had to be obtained in order to gain first-hand information that could provide IHLs with better ideas about the types or sort of soft skills most required from their various programs. Apart from that, faculties and lecturers needed to cooperate and be open

to the idea and actively assess the attainment of the soft skills attributes and whether their graduates were ready and prepared for the challenges of the job market.

With this in mind the Ministry designed an instrument to measure university students' perceptions of their soft skills attainment. This instrument, called the Malaysian Soft Skills Scale (My3S), was administered to all university students for the first time in 2010.

### **Malaysian Soft Skills Scale (My3S)**

According to Salih (2008), soft skills is all about the generic or personal skills that are non-academic and relates to attributes that set a person apart from others. MOHE (2006) stressed the importance of soft skills and considers its acquisition to be critical in this current fast changing world. The possession of good soft skills can be considered to be an asset to a person and may be the most important criteria for securing jobs as well as getting promotions along the way.

To further describe how important is the development of soft skills, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) developed an instrument to measure university students' perception of their soft skills attainment. This instrument, called the Malaysian Soft Skills Scale (better known as My3S), was first piloted in 2009 and then was administered to all university students for the first time in 2010. All university students are required to respond online to the My3S survey from the MOHE website by using their student identification numbers.

The 180-item instrument (Abdul Karim, et al., 2012) uses a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Does not reflect my principles) to 10 (Totally reflects my principles) for the Moral and Professional ethics element. Other items in the instrument use a similar scale where 0 is defined as 'Does not reflect me' and 10 as 'Completely reflects me'. Due to its confidentiality, the survey instrument is not made available for

public viewing (see Table 2). Because the instrument has been developed extensively as well as endorsed by the Ministry to be used throughout the country as a means to measure the effectiveness of soft skills development, these seven soft skills were adopted as the basic framework for this present study.

Table 2: Malaysian My3S instrument content

Soft skills elements	Number of items
Communication	30
Critical thinking & problem solving	30
Team work	30
Moral and professional ethics	30
Leadership	20
Life-long learning and Information management	20
Entrepreneurship	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>

Source: MOHE (2006)

The issue of employability has become increasingly important since the past ten years in Malaysia due to the changing industrial landscape making it more challenging for people to secure the jobs of their choice. The MOHE document on GEB stated the existing dilemma and debate regarding the priorities needing to be either “knowledge-driven or industry driven” (MOHE, 2012, p. 4).

### **Graduate employment and employability**

There has been increasing concern over Malaysian graduates not being able to secure jobs of their choice since the past 15 years. This problem may be in part attributed to graduates being selective of the kind of work they apply for or that they did not secure employment because they do not possess the necessary qualities that

employers look for. There is also feedback from employers and stake holders that applicants do not possess the desired soft skills which they need to help drive their business, corporation or organization for future development and success (Shakir, 2009; Schulz, 2008). Various anecdotal evidence have also shown concern over the issue of employees frequent changing of jobs whenever it gets demanding or unsatisfactory for them. This lack of commitment or staying power among some Malaysian graduates suggests a trend of 'job-hopping' practice among Malaysian workforce which does not paint an encouraging picture of Malaysian society.

Statistics of graduate employment of university graduates have become the concern among IHLs today. Data of graduate employment six months upon graduation is the measuring stick for universities to evaluate the success of their programs. This data, obtained from graduates coming back for their convocation ceremony is being used to gauge how successful IHLs and faculties have made their programs and how they can further improve to ensure more successful employment for their graduates. As universities and IHLs become increasingly competitive with the abundance of graduates from public and private IHLs this data is of concern and may be used as a source of evidence about the potential and value of certain tertiary programs. Unpopular programs may even have to be discontinued if it does not look like it would generate good career prospects for graduates (Statistics from UiTM Centre for Strategic Planning and Information, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013).

In order to ensure UiTM graduates secure good careers and have better competitive edge over other graduates, the "UiTM Holistic graduate attribute matrix" was developed by the UiTM Academic and International Affairs Division. This matrix addresses sixteen attributes in three dimensions: academic, personal and transferable skills dimensions (UiTM Academic Affairs, 2015). The sixteen attributes comprise of the "reflective learner; resourceful and responsible; effective communicator; responsive; ethically and socially sensitive; creative and innovative;

tech-savvy; adaptable; independent and critical thinker; confident; systematically inquisitive; solution provider; experienced collaborator; entrepreneurial; expert in the field and balanced graduate (intellectual-spiritual-emotional)". This newly developed matrix is to be used as a guideline and reference for faculties when conducting curriculum reviews and planning for new courses (see Appendix A). It is interesting that the selected attributes have been mapped against the academic, personal and transferable skills dimensions, indicating how seriously UiTM looks upon developing better employable graduates with the desired soft skills for their future success in life.

### **The Scenario of Music Education in Malaysia**

In line with many other countries, the Malaysian education system provides access to music education in primary and secondary schools; however, the intensity of music learning experiences varies in both classroom and co-curricular music opportunities. Although music is mandatory in primary schools, not all schools have the human resources, funds, means or facilities to accommodate a music program. Within those schools where music is delivered, it is often at risk of being replaced with "core" subjects such as math, science and language subjects. This most often occurs towards the end of the year at which time exams draw near and extra classes in core subjects are deemed more necessary (Ghazali, 2006). Access to music education is most divergent at the secondary level, where music is offered at only approximately 11% of public schools (Curriculum Development Division, 2014). In contrast, some of the more privileged day and government fully residential schools, as well as the Malaysian Arts Schools, offer performing groups such as traditional ensembles, choir, school band and wind or string orchestras. Most of them find opportunities to participate in various state, regional and national competitions organised each year.

### **Music in primary schools**

Primary school education in Malaysia begins at the age of 7 (Year 1) and ends at the age of 12 (Year 6). As with many other countries throughout the world, the Malaysian education system provides access to music education in the public schools from the primary to the secondary levels. However, music learning experiences in public schools vary widely in intensity in the classrooms as well as in co-curricular offerings. Although music is mandatory in the primary schools, not all schools have the human resource, funds, means or facilities to accommodate a music program. However, as national schools are government funded, equipment and instruments are usually provided for. National-type schools, being government assisted do get some privileges, however, parent-teacher associations of these schools provide the necessary monetary assistance when needed.

### **Music in secondary schools**

Secondary school education begins at the age of 13 (Form 1) and ends at the age of 17 (Form 5). To date, there are a total of 2,376 public secondary day schools in Malaysia. However, music is offered only at 11% of those schools. The distribution of schools across the country offering music as part of the curriculum is seen in Appendix B. Other secondary schools comprise of the residential schools (government full boarding schools) that are separately funded from the normal day schools. Most of these residential schools are privileged enough to be able to offer choir, school band and other ensembles, including wind and string orchestras as part of their co-curricular activity.

### **Formal, non-formal and informal music education**

In parallel with the school music curriculum and co-curricular activities is the formal, non-formal and informal music learning that occurs in private music centres and

various locations situated in state capitals and town centres all over Malaysia. Formal music learning, seen in the private music centres which offer external examinations such as those by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Guildhall, Trinity and Yamaha have often become somewhat of a status symbol for many families in Malaysia. Graded music certificates demonstrate extracurricular achievement and are often regarded as a safety net for those who do not excel in their academic studies. This indicates a belief that a career in music (most often in teaching) is a viable option if all else fails (Ghazali, 2006).

On the other hand, the non-formal educational sector, represented by music centres, non-governmental organizations and agencies (Salih, 2008), includes many folk and traditional music learning which are mostly through rote learning. The informal educational sector which is represented by media, television, radio, newspaper and other sources of information from the community all play a role in the structured and unstructured exposure and training in music. The result of these varied pre-university experiences is a population of Malaysian school leavers with varying musical exposure, experiences and competencies who apply to common higher education music programs at the level of diplomas and degrees.

### **Music in private music schools or centres**

In parallel to the school music curriculum is the formal music learning activities outside of school in private music centres and academies situated in various state capitals and cities. These centres provide more structured and focused training in playing an instrument which is often not achieved effectively in the public schools. Private music learning which provides students with opportunities to earn external graded certificates of achievement to show their music skills (such as ABRSM, LCM, Guildhall, Trinity and Yamaha) are sought after by private music students in Malaysia,

so much so that graded certifications from these examination bodies have become somewhat as a status symbol for many families.

Ghazali's (2006, 2009) study on children's motivation to learn music looked at how children felt about learning music in school compared to learning privately in music centres. The study found that children who were enrolled in music classes outside of school varied in their interest to learn school music. Different perceptions towards the importance, usefulness and enjoyment of learning music at school suggests that there are positive aspects about learning music together with peers at school which has its value compared to learning music in silo with private music teachers. Although the participants who were learning privately outside of school felt that they already knew a lot of what was taught in school, being with their friends and being able to show their music skills was gratifying, especially when their teachers and friends sought them for performances in school functions.

Thus with the varying exposures and experiences in music as mentioned above, Malaysian school leavers applying into higher education music programs come with varying musical exposure, experiences and competencies in music. How these skills may also translate to musical tasks and activities are discussed below.

### **How soft skills are translated in the field of music**

#### ***Communication skills***

Verbal communication is one of the most important soft skills that everyone should have irregardless of field or profession. According to Salih (2008), graduates' inability to effectively communicate in both the Bahasa Melayu and English language will be a "set back" to the "advancement of the country" (p. 6). As graduates leave universities to seek work and join the job market in society, stakeholders and potential employers have expectations of new employees which need to be fulfilled. The ability to

communicate thoughts, ideas, and solutions to problems faced at work is an important asset to an employee which stakeholders look for. Schulz (2008) mentioned that communication skills are “not only necessary for a person’s professional career, but .... to one’s so-called social competence” (p. 149) Therefore communication skills is of utmost importance in any field.

In the music field, communication takes the form of many different musical and non musical acts and tasks. Composers communicate their ideas in the music they create which is then performed by many musicians. Musicians communicate the music that they play through technical and hard skills on their various instruments and learn to interpret the music written by composers. In performing music, verbal communication with producers, music directors, fellow musicians, crew members, sound engineers, music arrangers and stage managers. Music teachers on the other hand communicate knowledge and training in their various delivery methods both in the classroom and the individual lessons. Without good communication skills all the tasks mentioned above would not have attained the desired outcomes.

### ***Critical thinking & problem solving skills***

Being able to solve problems and adapt to new situations as well as overcome challenges describes this soft skill need among new graduates. For music practitioners, the ability to be versatile and adapt to new performing situations and environments are crucial. Music teachers also face many problems and situations in the classroom that requires quick thinking and creative problem solving skills. With experience this ability would be an asset to the musician and music practitioner as it would save precious time rectifying mistakes made.

### ***Teamwork skills***

Being able to work with people in order to achieve a common goal while at the same time respecting other people's opinions and attitudes as well as cooperate with decisions made by others is an important characteristic. Musicians especially need to cultivate this soft skill so that a harmonious participation and collaboration in all activities is achieved.

### ***Work ethics and professionalism***

The ability to behave professionally with good ethics and respect for others, with the ability to sustain good relationships is a much sought after characteristic among employees. This soft skill includes good sense of responsibility and consideration for others and the ability to conduct oneself with courtesy. In the music field, being an expert or professional musician or practitioner requires one to portray confidence, patience with high moral standards with others and able to negotiate terms and engagement activities with correct procedures and protocols..

### ***Leadership skills***

Apart from being a teamplayer and being able to work with others, employers expect employees to also be able to plan and strategize as well as take charge in some activities or tasks at the work place. In the music field, leadership is a necessity in performing situations where musicians must be responsible for their own practices either alone or in sectionals. The term leadership also applies to music practitioners leading their musical lives, striving to make progress and increase performance skills and charting their own career paths independently. For music teachers leadership skills is an essential ingredient for the success of the teaching process whether in schools or privately. Someone with good leadership skills tend to also have good

problem solving skills and communication skills, the process of leading often involves active interaction with other people.

### ***Lifelong learning and information management skills***

Lifelong learning skills involves the interest and positive attitude towards continued learning and updating new knowledge and skills. This aspect of graduates is seen in the interest to continue learning and adapting new knowledge to current expertise in a given area. For the music practitioner, training in music is a lifelong learning issue. Musical knowledge is evolving and ever changing. Therefore learning does not stop upon graduating with the desired qualification in music.

### ***Entrepreneurship skills***

The ability to recognize business opportunities and potential especially in the music industry is an important criteria for continued sustenance in a very challenging field. This skill enables one to be creative and ready to explore possibilities. Someone with strong entrepreneurship skills will also show inclinations to be independent and not opposed to being self-employed.

### **Challenges faced by IHL offering music programs**

#### ***Intake and selection process***

The issue of obtaining the right candidates into specific music programs have always been a challenge for all higher education institutions all over the world. As the field of music is so diverse with expertise dependent on musical aptitude and passion for the field, some applicants come into the program with minimal formal learning of music but with some exposure and experience in performing music.

The study by MOHE (2010) looked into all the entry requirements of music programs of Malaysian IHLs offering bachelor's degrees in music. It can be

concluded that most Malaysian applicants into tertiary music programs lack the desired formal musical qualifications unlike at overseas universities and colleges and this undoubtedly “contributes to the problem of producing music graduates with required skills within a short period of time” (p.16). This common lament of universities is the lack of formal education in music among most applicants which is prevalent across all IHLs offering music programs. A three or four year degree program in music is often insufficient to provide the necessary training to be music professionals upon graduation. This is because music training beginning at a younger age has shown to be the best head start anyone could have. Yet miracles do happen and over the years, successful graduates have made it in the professional music scene in Malaysian society, often even becoming internationally recognized. And these professionals surprisingly were among those applicants with minimal music backgrounds.

### **Transition from university to professional life**

Music students are often given ample opportunities to perform either solo or in groups during their years at university. These exposures and performing activities provide the much needed hands-on experiences descriptive of the world of performing arts. These experiences help students form and reinforce perceptions about their own abilities in comparison with others and enable them to work on their strengths and weaknesses in preparation for future work in music. While some students form accurate expectations and perceptions of the demands of the music field in relation to their own capabilities, there are others who are not able to form correct judgments of their musical expertise and therefore set unrealistic goals and career paths that are not aligned to their strengths.

According to Weller (2012) one of the challenges of soon to be graduates is the sudden loss of the support structure for music making which comes to an end at

the end of the three or four years at university. Upon graduation, the graduate is on their own and need to chart their own path towards a career in music which is often unstructured and rarely straightforward (Weller, 2012) and also often unknown. The period of transition from university to the real world of work needs courage, perseverance and persistent effort to secure jobs, often needing high levels of personal motivation and drive. An added personal ability to spot opportunities and work possibilities would be of tremendous help for the new graduate seeking to earn a living.

### **Careers and work in Music**

The term 'career in music' is not easily defined as in other fields. For musicians and music practitioners, the notion of having a career in music is unlike any 9 to 5 job that pays consistent wages. Often times music practitioners engage in multiple jobs, multi task and rely on their networking skills in order to sustain work and earn a living.

### ***Concept of portfolio careers***

Much has been written about the uncertainties of careers in music, where talent itself is often not sufficient for continued success (Beeching, 2012; Bennett, Beeching, Perkins, Carruthers & Weller, 2012; Creech, Papageorgi, Duffy, Morton, Haddon, et al, 2008). Throughout history it has been known that careers in music often do not pay well. Musicians often need to "augment their salaries with a variety of work including teaching and freelancing" (Bennett, Beeching, Perkins, Carruthers & Weller, 2012, p. 5). This is true as musicians have to be multiskilled and versatile with a willingness to explore new and uncharted possibilities . They not only have to know many musical genres but also be able to perform multiple roles in society, working with many 'employers' at the same time and deal with many requests with different requirements. In short, musicians need to diversify their musical careers and learn to

be entrepreneurial as well as be adventurous enough to explore opportunities that are out of the traditional roles of the music field.

### ***Definition and description of portfolio music careers***

A new term has emerged recently which describes music in terms of portfolio careers. The concept of portfolio careers in music, as mentioned by Bennett, Beeching, Perkins, Carruthers and Weller (2012); and Smilde (2009) is an apt description of what music careers have become in this day and age where work in music no longer can be described in terms of the traditional idea of being employed. Now music practitioners need to make connections with society, be able to 'sell' themselves, have entrepreneurial sense, and be versatile enough to adapt to different environments and situations. Smilde (2012) mentioned that there is a "shift in the nature of musicians' careers" and this has created a more "flexible career patterns" with "a greater need for transferable skills in areas such as self-management, decision-making and business" (p. 100). Furthermore, portfolio careers in music also describes the music practitioner as frequently being self-employed and mobile with brief part time employment and "overlapping of activities" (Smilde, 2012, p. 100). With that description, it is clear that, like music practitioners all over the world, those in Malaysia also can be seen playing multiple roles between performer and teacher, suggesting a constant learning and relearning of the skills of the profession. In addition, it is collaborative with other experts in the performing arts area.

As music practitioners often survive on portfolio careers, personal attributes such as discipline, networking skills, entrepreneurial skills and "career self-management" are important for the survival of those with careers in music (Bartleet, Bennett, Bridgstock, Draper, Harrison & Schippers, 2012, p. 32).

## Theoretical Framework

Three frameworks on generic or soft skills were analysed to have a better understanding of employability and how generic skills or soft skills fit into the preparation of an employable graduate. Dacre Pool & Sewell's (2007) model which describes essential components of employability is shown in Figure 7 below. This model, which is called using the "mnemonic "CareerEDGE" is used as an aid to remember the five components on the lower tier of the model" (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 280). Each component (see lowest tier) actually overlaps with each other.

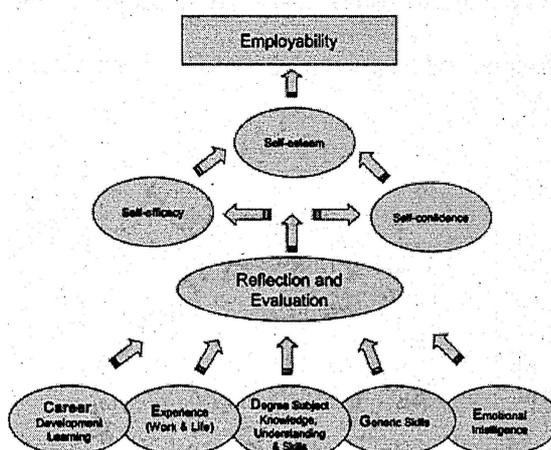


Figure 7: The CareerEDGE model of graduate employability  
(Source: Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 280)

However, the authors described that while graduates are often assessed through the successful completion of their related fields, "subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills... alone are unlikely to secure a graduate occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful" (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 282).

A metaphorical model was designed next to describe the concept of employability that relates to higher education graduates upon leaving university (see Figure 8). According to this second model, which resembles a metaphorical image of

a “key”, the graduate who is equipped with all the five components (Career development learning, Experience, Degree subject knowledge, Generic skills and Emotional intelligence) and the ability to reflect and evaluate themselves will be more successful at gaining employability. The authors stated that the term “generic skills” may be referred to as “core skills”, “key skills” or “transferable skills” (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 282). These skills represent the skills which support the individual and can be transferable across all disciplines. On the other hand the term “emotional intelligence” is included as it is important for graduates to reflect on what they learned, how successfully they have acquired knowledge and how well they manage their own emotions and in relationships with other people. With all these skills, the graduate may then unlock the door towards having better employability qualities.

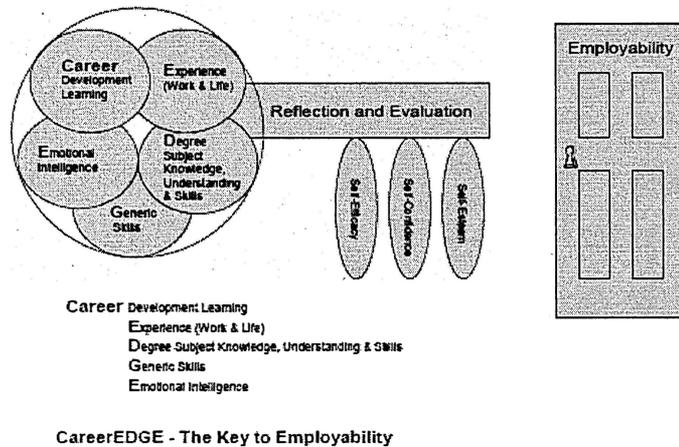


Figure 8: A metaphorical model of employability  
 (Source: Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 281.)

This framework by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) will be used as a point of reference for the discussion of findings of this present study which will also look at the seven soft skills attributes developed by MOHE (2006).

## Summary

The role of higher education has come under great scrutiny since the past 20 years. The concern over unemployment and the purpose of IHLs to provide adequate

training for sustainable development has been debated at great length not only in Malaysia but also in many other countries. The fact that university graduates have increased in numbers over the years have made it harder for job seekers to get the job they want. Studies into what employers look for in new employees have provided more understanding about the kinds of attributes expected of new graduates. IHLs therefore have the responsibility of ensuring that their graduates have all the much sought after qualities that stakeholders want.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of music professionals and practitioners regarding specific soft skills attributes that were considered important and necessary for all music graduates to possess in order to be successful in their varied careers in music. The various professions in music as defined in Chapter 1 comprised of those involved in the performance, teaching, organizers or directors of music activities, as found in the Malaysian music industry.

#### **Sample**

The study utilised convenience sampling to secure respondents for the study where all respondents were interviewed. A majority are known to the researcher as a result of close communication and networking with the music industry. From the professional contacts, snowball sampling helped obtain additional sample who are not known to the researcher. In order to obtain snapshot backgrounds of selected music practitioners within the limited circle of music professionals in Malaysia, sample selection was largely based on their wide range of experience, their ability to speak from a number of perspectives and experiences, their role in the organization they work for, their experience and opportunities to work with music graduates, their gender as well as their capacity to be employers for musicians and graduates.

Participants included orchestral conductors, professional musicians, music directors, music educators, choral director/trainers and music arrangers. Interviews were conducted among eight music practitioners, some of whom were obtained through a snowball sampling method which was felt to be effective in reaching a range of musicians who may not otherwise have been located. A list of possible additional sample were obtained from interviewees but due to time constraints and

the fact that some suggested sample were extremely busy with their individual schedules, interviews were unable to be arranged. For example, two potential samples said that they were available only after two months due to a prior engagement with a television network, while a few others had overseas performances scheduled. Many of the potential participants suggested by interview subjects remained in the waiting list as too much time was taken up by waiting and trying to secure unsuccessful appointments in between extensive transcribing efforts.

The professionals were mostly based or located within and around the city of Kuala Lumpur and were accessible through personal contacts with UiTM's Faculty of Music either as part time lecturers, workshop speakers, or through performance collaborations in the past. The most important criteria for selection of respondents was that they should have had tertiary education in music and in their varying professions in the music industry.

### **Research instrument**

The interview protocol was designed to obtain information that ranged from questions focused towards participants' background and musical experiences, their transition period from university or college to careers in music, as well as their perception of generic/soft skills important in their music careers. It was divided into four main sections:

- Section A: Demographic profile of participants
- Section B: Transition from higher education to professional career
- Section C: Professional career
- Section D: As employer/manager/director/conductor/music teacher

Section A sought information such as their age, gender, year graduated, qualification, instrument(s) played, and the types of work they did. Section B

investigated the work they graduation, the difficulty of finding work, the challenge they faced finding work after graduation, how they felt their university education helped them the most to gain work after graduation, and whether they had any mentors that helped them during the transition. Section C looked at their professional career, how satisfied they were with their current work, and what they felt were important attributes music professionals should have as well as which attributes they felt they have become good at. For the last section, Section D, participants were asked about what sort of attributes they would look for in a potential employee, and their perceived most important soft skills.

### **Pilot Study**

The data for pilot interviews was obtained from 4 respondents who helped give valuable preliminary feedback about their musical journeys after graduation. The pilot study was instrumental in providing a better idea of the quality of the questions asked and the length of the total interview session. Only some minor adjustments were made to the way some questions were asked.

### **Data collection**

Data collection involved conducting extensive interviews with respondents who were selected based on their contribution and involvement in the Malaysian music industry. Phone calls and text messages to potential respondents, who were mostly known to the researcher were initiated to provide early information about the study and to find out if they were interested to be part of the study. Upon explaining the nature and purpose of the study, an appointment was made for an interview session. During the meeting of the scheduled interview, respondents were given a letter of invitation as participants in the study and a Consent Form was signed before the interview commenced. Participants were informed that the interview would take approximately two hours. Interview locations took place at the convenience of the respondents,

either at their work premises (Istana Budaya, Radio Television Malaysia, or University Kebangsaan Malaysia), at the researcher's office or at various cafes and food courts.

### **Data analysis**

Interviews were transcribed and analysed, and codings assigned to the responses was mainly based on the seven key soft skills categories by the MOHE which was used as a framework for this study. For the purpose of preserving anonymity, participants will be referred to in this report by their pseudonyms.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter reports and describes the results of the data collected for this study which aims to look at how music professionals and practitioners perceive the importance of soft skills and what soft skills are necessary for the survival of music graduates in a dynamic world of work in music.

#### Results of the Interviews

##### Demographic profile of participants

Eight music professionals (five males and three females) were interviewed and asked to share their educational backgrounds and experiences in music. Subjects were selected and invited based on their experiences and contribution to the music industry. As this study looked at issues concerning graduate employability, the subject's role as stakeholders and employers were also determinants for the selection process. Their training in music, whether local or international was not a criteria for selection.

Four participants obtained their tertiary music qualifications from international universities (Joe, DM, Zack and Mus) while the remaining four participants (Ozer, Delli, Alyn and Lina) were alumni of UiTM. Their demographic profiles are described briefly in Table 3. It can be seen that the participants' ages ranged from the 70s to the age of 26, with a wide span of working experience (from 46 years to 2 years). From the summary of their job specifications, it can be concluded that most participants were involved in music production, training and directing performing groups.

Table 3: Summary of participants

No	Name	Gender	Age	Years of work in music	Job specs
1	Joe	M	74	46	Conductor, part time lecturer
2	DM	M	52	24	Music director, conductor, musician, arranger
3	Mus	M	54	15	Conductor, musician, part time lecturer, private instrumental teacher
4	Zack	M	53	27	Music producer, director, arranger, musician, record producer, part time lecturer, private instrumental teacher
5	Ozer	M	40	18	Music producer, director, arranger, musician, part time lecturer
6	Delli	F	38	14	Choral trainer, conductor, part time lecturer
7	Alyn	F	47	6	Band director
8	Lina	F	26	2	Choral and voice trainer

More detailed demographic information about the eight participants are described below.

1. Joe

Joe, the oldest among the male participants (aged 74), graduated from Berklee College of Music, Boston in 1968 and is one of Malaysia's most well-known orchestral conductor and arranger. He is still a very much respected conductor and is currently employed on contract basis in a university, assisting with developing their orchestra and music activities. He also teaches on a part-time basis in various universities, focusing on arranging and harmony classes.

2. Mus

Mus, (aged 54) is a resident conductor for the Malaysian National Symphony Orchestra (NSO). He spent his tertiary education in Germany as well as the Netherlands. Upon graduation he proceeded to work overseas and did not return to Malaysia only after six years. He actively conducts workshops and masterclasses and teaches part time at various universities.

3. DM

DM is an orchestral conductor and manager, who is active also as a music director in television broadcasting, an active arranger and performs regularly in gigs, clubs, hotels and often as backup musician for artistes. DM (aged 52) was given a government scholarship to pursue his degree overseas and obtained his degree from Berklee College of Music in the US.

4. Zack

Zack, aged 53, is a professional musician, arranger, composer as well as a music and recording producer. He currently owns his own music production company and does part time music teaching both privately as well as at various universities. He spent a good 18 years in the U.S. before returning to Malaysia.

5. Ozer

Ozer, aged 40, a male participant who was trained locally in Malaysia (at UiTM). He currently owns a music production company and actively performs as a freelance musician, music arranger, and produces music shows and performances both for stage as well as television. He has recently expanded his business to include the rental services of sound systems for concerts and musical events. He occasionally teaches on a part time basis at universities.

6. Delli

Delli, aged 38, graduated from UiTM in the year 2000. She is a free-lance choral trainer in many government as well as corporate bodies. She also provides private voice training and coaching for reality TV shows and programs.

7. Alyn

Alyn, a 47 year old alumni of UiTM is a police superintendent with the Malaysian Police Force. She joined the force with the intention of being attached to the police band but was instead assigned to various divisions and departments during her initial training and subsequent services. As a result she served the force as a police officer for 17 years before finally being promoted as Music Director to the police band. In total she has been with the police force for 23 years.

8. Lina

Lina, a 26 year old alumna who graduated in 2012, is currently a choir trainer for various national level children and adult choral groups located in and around Kuala Lumpur. Apart from keeping busy with work Lina also indulges in her own online business and is exploring other possibilities of career enhancement.

**Participants' experiences as new graduates**

All participants reported active music participation and performing involvement even before they graduated. As most degree level music programs are three years in duration, participants recalled that they began performing through self-initiated efforts as well as a result of encouragement from their studio teachers from the second year of study. Male participants, irregardless of local or overseas education reported that they were given encouragement and suggestions to perform outside of the university

from their professors or instrument teachers who also performed with them. For example, the four participants (Joe, DM, Mus, and Zack) who earned overseas degrees reported performing together with their professors in clubs, gigs and concerts outside of the university, while Joe had the privilege of being invited to perform together with faculty members in their own personal groups on a regular basis. Some examples of experiences are seen below.

*Outside the school I joined a lot of orchestras...big orchestras, small orchestras. Even faculty members have their own group where they performed outside. I was the only student in the faculty group. (Joe)*

*I was with a jazz teacher that I wanted to learn from, and he got me to play a lot. Performing in school first... so immediately after school I got all my gigs lined up. (Zack)*

Similarly, participants who were alumni of UiTM (therefore locally trained) reported active participation outside of university in concerts, gigs and shows in hotels and clubs. These experiences were a result of knowing professional musicians in the industry and invited as back up musicians or singers for concerts, shows and functions or events. Almost all participants reported their early involvement in shows outside of university before they graduated helped them become familiar with people in the music industry.

*I was doing part time even before I graduated.... It started from there. (Lina)*

*When I was at third year at UiTM, I jammed a lot with people outside. May be I was lucky when one keyboardist was not available... one musician asked me if I could play. So they auditioned me immediately and I got it. It was for a rock concert. From then on I started working. We had rehearsals every Friday after I finished classes. (Ozer)*

Participants were asked about what they did within the first six months to a year after completing their studies at university. It was evident that all eight participants had very similar experiences prior to graduation. All stated that they were actively performing and conducting freelance music related activities in their final year of study which continued after graduation. In comparison, participants who were overseas had more privileges to indulge in more performing experiences outside of university due to the more musically active environment. However, regardless of being trained locally or internationally, it appears that participants did not have any difficulty in securing work or earning a living through performing engagements during the crucial timeframe of six months to a year after completing their university degrees. This smooth transition after graduating was attributed to their active involvement in part time or freelance performing experiences while at university.

For example, Mus, who studied overseas, taught music privately even as a student, and performed in chamber and orchestral groups in Germany and Holland. Upon returning to Malaysia he proceeded to renew old acquaintances who then helped initiate concerts and recitals for him in order to promote himself to the Malaysian public.

*The first year I don't have a full time job. I just had part time jobs. And I have those gigs...it's all not a full time job, but if you accumulate everything it's quite a lot. You have part time job at the universities, you have private students, and you have gigs, you have recording, and then besides that to sell yourself you have to do concerts... Being a performer you have to do concerts. (Mus)*

Similarly, Alyn, who studied in UiTM, reported that she was very lucky that on the very last day at UiTM she was informed by a friend about a teaching vacancy at the State Education Department. Therefore the demand for music teachers at that

time was timely for her. In addition, the fact that jobs in music were available at that time

*Right on the very last day at UiTM, my friend told me about a vacancy... for a music teacher. That was during the early 1990s. After one year as a music teacher I worked as a musician, then I got into the police force. They wanted a women's police band and was looking for a woman to be in charge...so they offered it to me. (Alyn)*

In contrast to the rest of the participants, Joe and DM, who were sponsored students by the Malaysian government did not face any transition experiences after graduation as they had a job waiting for them as soon as they returned home to Malaysia.

In general, the transition period of six months to a year for the participants were very smooth. No participant complained or reported of any problems finding something to do to earn a living after graduation. The fact that they had been actively involved in music related activities even before graduating helped tremendously in securing work upon completion of their studies. In addition, six participants mentioned that their musical knowledge and experiences gained from the university curriculum gave them more confidence to seek performing engagements during the transition period. Some even felt that they had the competitive edge over other musicians in the private sectors because of their broad exposure to different genres of music as a result of their tertiary education.

When asked if participants had any mentors who helped them through the transition period of six months to a year, four out of the eight participants said that they were appreciative of the support they received from significant people in their lives. Three participants, DM, Zack and Mus mentioned their professors as their mentor who pointed them towards selected gigs and shows that could help promote

them. Two participants, Delli and Lina on the other hand mentioned their graduated senior as the backbone for pushing them towards making good decisions upon graduating.

### **Soft skills needed among musicians**

When asked whether tertiary education had helped them in the development of both hard and soft skills, all participants indicated the equal importance of having good technical skills on their instruments with soft skills and/or personal attributes to secure work not only at the beginning but also in the long run, to sustain their various careers in music.

Discipline was considered the most important of these personal attitudes:

*Discipline... in music professionals, it's very, very important. They need to discipline themselves. That's for the habit of practicing, of playing....for both music and non-music. If you're on time then you will know how much time you can save. In music professionals it's very very important. (Zack)*

*Discipline....very important! Because of discipline you're a bad player. Because of discipline you are a bad manager. Because of discipline you cannot get a job. It's all back to discipline. (Mus)*

*Discipline is very important. Discipline is not only in coming in early, but what you do when you have arrived. (DM)*

*Discipline of course! Discipline means in everything...in your practice, you have to be prepared. Don't come for rehearsals and make it difficult for others because you didn't practice! (Delli)*

Other soft skills included honesty, sincerity, responsibility, diplomacy, cooperation, good attitude towards work, good networking skills, tolerance,

humbleness, time management skills, willingness to compromise, integrity, perseverance, diligence, teamwork spirit, good communication and human relation skills, team player, confidence, professionalism, ability to inspire others, having work ethics, problem solving skills and critical thinking skills are considered essential in order to 'survive' the challenging and competitive world of work in music.

*You have to be professional. How you think, how you behave, how you carry yourself... In dealing with people who are not professional, you have to be professional yourself. You have to educate them... you have to advise them... even up to the minister level. They will ask for your expertise ...at times you can oblige them, at times you cannot... it depends on the situation. (DM)*

*You have to be honest and sincere, not just working for the money. I have seen people who are calculative and not sincere in their efforts, just because they are not paid well. For me, I may sometimes be paid pittance, but because I love to do it, I do it for the love of music. I love being with the kids. I love to share what I have. I could earn three times what I got ...but because I like the job I just do it. (Delli)*

On the other hand, for Alyn, a police force band director, a positive, neat and clean appearance is an important criteria for musicians in her band. In fact, confidence and a good overall image come first not only to her but also to the whole police force.

*While musical skills are important, confidence, courage to face challenges, able to adapt to situations and having good PR skills are important. (Alyn)*

### **Perceptions of what is important in the curriculum**

All participants agreed that it is not possible to learn everything one needed to know from the university curriculum and within the timeframe of a degree, which is three to

four years (depending on the program). This reinforces the importance and benefits of formal instruction prior to entry into university that helps in the acquisition of further skills and training towards becoming music professionals. Interestingly many of them emphasised that informal learning formed a crucial role during university studies, enabling theory to be put into practice and skills to be practiced and developed throughout the years of study:

*If you ask me, between here (local) and there (international)... I still say that lecturers can only do so much. A lot of the time I learned a lot more on the streets..... If you're too shy to ask then you're not gonna learn. (Zack) <*

The fact that a majority of participants had minimal formal training in music before entering university made them more appreciative of the overall musical training they received both in and outside university throughout the duration of their study. Participants stated that the core music subjects gave them the much needed hard skills in music that they lacked. However the development of personal attributes were equally, if not more important. When mapped against the framework set by the MEB, the important soft skills attributes mentioned by participants focused more towards the personality and connectivity attributes. For example, confidence, courage, communication skills, commitment, time management skills, teamwork skills, planning skills, and leadership skills, adaptability to environment, professionalism, as well as overall integrity to the profession all emerged as important. Participants strongly urged the inclusion of more opportunities for students to experience and develop these skills in performance and hands-on activities as early as possible during their university education.

### **Preparedness for work**

Thinking about their preparedness for work, participants were asked what, if any gaps had existed within their music degree training, and what had been the most important

learning. As expected, all participants affirmed the importance of prior formal and structured training in core courses before entering university. Having a late start in formal training hampered the progress of students and made the music learning more challenging as they needed to learn fast and be able to catch up with those who have had formal training.

*I came in from zero. Learned the piano only at the age of 20...and learned to sing. When I was in the diploma program I didn't know where I was going. I had vocal lessons and finally understood the techniques only in semester 7. (Delli)*

Apart from theoretical skills in music, musicality was considered as the next important skill needed in order to be successful music practitioners, as seen in the comment below which shows evidence that while technical abilities are very important in the professional training of musicians, some soft skills are much harder to teach or obtain. The citation below clearly shows the extent of soft skill that is difficult to teach as it is subjective and dependent on the individual's ability for reflection and deeper thinking about music and interpretation.

*Soul!! When you have the right soul all the technical abilities will fall into place. If you don't have it in here (showing his heart)... please, quit! Why waste your time, why waste your money? You will get really frustrated cos you're not going to be called... cos you don't have it in you. Soul is feel ... those dynamics, expression, interpretation! (Zack)*

Feedback regarding perception of gaps in the curriculum was more related to participants' musical knowledge and hard skills gained at the point of entry as compared to what they achieved and utilized. All participants mentioned the importance of learning harmony and arranging techniques, which were found to be the most helpful in their career and which made a big difference to their 'marketability' outside the university. The fact that they were already actively using those hard skills

whilst they were still learning at university and able to see the relevance and importance of it and to apply in their practice indicates the ability to internalise knowledge and gain from the learning.

### **Desired soft skills attributes**

When asked about what soft skills attributes would the participants look for when hiring or recruiting new members into their organization or group, participants mentioned discipline as the most important. Almost all of them described discipline as the core attribute which is seen in punctuality, commitment, attention to detail, persistence in practice, and being able to manage time efficiently. However, most participants stated that music graduates are only half ready for the world of work if they were not exposed early to the industry while at university. Ozer specifically stressed that what helped him the most was his curiosity and persistence in observing backstage operations and rehearsals, and following gigs and concerts and asking questions. He said that by doing what he did, the people in the industry became familiar with his presence and his eagerness to learn, thus his unexpected break to stand in for a sick keyboardist was a result of his being there at the right time. Zack on the other hand stressed the importance of punctuality in all musicians that he worked with. He said that it would be almost impossible to achieve what he had planned if schedules are not followed according to plan. Being punctual to him is the essence of being a professional musician.

Other soft skills mentioned are having good communication skills that are often seen in how musicians converse and interact with potential clients and stakeholders, how they project an image of confidence in the way they speak and express ideas. Most participants said that it was not sufficient for musicians to be good at music if they cannot project themselves well through good communication skills.

Being able to adapt to different situations and environments, in short, being versatile and flexible is another important trait to have among professional musicians. This is because throughout the course of their career, they will be faced with different situations and circumstances which require patience, tolerance and being able to compromise.

### **Summary**

Findings across all participants, regardless of extent of working experience were similar in perceiving the importance of self-discipline and ability to manage oneself responsibly. All participants emphasized the fact that although technical skills in music were very important in the development of a professional musician or music practitioner, the personal qualities such as communication skills, teamwork skills, interest to continue learning (lifelong learning) and motivation to excel were important traits to have in order to achieve success in music. They all were synonymous in saying that being visible and active in the music industry before graduation helps tremendously in their job search upon graduation.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to examine and to understand the situation regarding soft skills and music graduate employability from the perspective of alumni, music professionals and employers in the Malaysian music industry. The interview method was used to gather in depth data from eight subjects regarding their personal experiences as music students while at university, their transition experiences upon graduating and their professional comments about seven soft skills attributes which were perceived as important for music practitioners in order to sustain their various careers in music.

Significant change in Malaysian education since the past ten years has resulted in an unprecedented focus on the development of soft or generic skills within both school-level and higher education. The concurrent focus on employability and the unmet challenges of employability for graduates of higher education, specifically on music graduates is the current concern of the Faculty of Music at UiTM. Drawing on the results of in-depth study with eight participants it was clear that while high level of musical skills are essential for all musicians and practitioners, the generic soft skills are equally or in fact more important in making graduates more marketable and employable.

As the Malaysian music industry is small, practitioners in the field tend to be known and recognized. Newly graduated students trying to secure work in music have got to prove their abilities not only through their musical skills but more often through the image they present such as a pleasant personality, good attitude towards work, perseverance, sense of responsibility, attention to detail, self-confidence, and able to problem solve and have good working relations with people. The eight participants in this study have mentioned how important it is to have good

performance track record with music producers, music directors and other stakeholders in order to enjoy continued performing engagements or contracts.

The Malaysian MOE's emphasis on the importance of soft skills development across the school years as seen in the MEB and GEB plans indicates a serious attention and recognition of what is crucial in the employability of workforce in Malaysian society. The use of the My3S instrument to measure graduates' soft skills attainment is a way to gauge the extent of success of various higher education programs not only in terms of academic preparation but also in character building.

### **Discussion of findings**

The discussion of findings for this study is presented by answering the research questions stated in Chapter 1.

#### **1. What are the transition experiences of music professionals which helped in their careers after university?**

It was evident from all participants interviewed that transition experiences upon graduation was made smoother through prior involvements outside of the university and being visible in the music industry. Music performing exposure and experiences outside of the university either through the activities organized by the faculty or through independent involvement of students on their own initiative are very important starting points for the development of a professional musician or performer. Thus, the exposure to the real world of work in music through hands-on field experiences became the key to being 'known' or visible to the industry. The fact that participants' visibility was not only in performing but also in being an active observer or shadow for selected musicians who functioned as a role model, was helpful in giving valuable first hand knowledge of how life is in the industry. Once a relationship or a network is established, it may eventually lead to an unexpected opportunity as a

result of being there at the right time. This was described by four participants who advocate strongly the 'shadow or buddy system' in order to gain hands-on knowledge and experience as well as access to networking opportunities. This head start to the world of work before graduation either through being back-up musicians, stage crew, apprentice music arranger, music writer/scorer, sound crew, or even a temporary 'stand-in' musician helped tremendously and expedited graduates' ability to be engaged or employed as musicians.

## **2. What are the soft skills attributes necessary among musicians as expected by practitioners in the music industry?**

Feedback from the eight participants of this study regarding soft skills attributes they thought were important and necessary among music graduates saw a consensus about the importance of discipline, good time management and punctuality. Participants who were also part time lecturers at various IHLs described specific scenarios about lateness and lack of discipline among university music students and their concern for this bad habit. Punctuality for rehearsals was at the top of the list as they equated lateness with lack of discipline or poor time management. Three participants specifically mentioned that attendance 'on time' at rehearsals means being there at least half an hour before rehearsal is supposed to start and not 5 minutes before. They stressed that as the act of attending rehearsals and preparing for performance involves processes that take time such as arriving at the venue, walking to the rehearsal room, taking instruments out of the case, tuning, and warming up, all musicians should be disciplined enough to be able to be there ahead of time to allow all these to take place. This description of processes is an apt reminder about how students need to be taught to plan their time ahead of the scheduled practice session or rehearsals as much time is found wasted waiting for them to arrive and be prepared for rehearsals. In preparation for the world of work, music faculties must therefore instil this habit among music students so that they

develop the awareness of time management and punctuality. The fact that this bad habit is rampant among UiTM music students not only for rehearsals but also for classes indicates a trend of lack of concern for punctuality. Stricter enforcement of timeliness is necessary so that a habit is formed that would carry across to their working world after graduation.

Communication skills was also stressed as being an important soft skill for music students to have as they would need to be able to interact and negotiate with potential clients, employers and the public. Good communication skills, whether verbal or written in Bahasa Melayu as well as English is necessary in order to be able to promote oneself and project a confident image. Alongside this is the ability to work together with other people (teamwork) and have good social skills that would help in marketing oneself in the music industry. Thus this aspect of music students' training at university is very much in line with the MOHE Graduate Employability Blueprint as well as the UiTM Holistic Graduate Attributes which stress that all graduates should have good soft skills in order to ensure employability upon graduation.

An interest for continued personal development and an ability to internalise personal strengths and weaknesses as mentioned by four participants indicates an alignment with the Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) model, where *reflection* and *evaluation* of oneself is important in lifelong learning. The fact that all participants stated that it was impossible to learn everything one needs to know at university indicates that students need to constantly be interested to learn outside of the classroom as well as have persistence and perseverance to continue learning new things, especially in the music industry where it is dynamic and ever changing not only locally but also globally. This finding is also aligned with the importance of problem solving and critical thinking skills as stated in the MOHE soft skills attributes as musicians and music practitioners need to be able to solve problems and issues, sometimes ad hoc and when they least expect it.

## Implications for music educators in Malaysia

In view of feedback and comments from the participants in this study, it is clear therefore that the development of soft skills need to be a conscious and active part of the Malaysian curriculum including in the music curriculum. Scrutiny of the paper work of curriculums and their reviews indicate that this aspect of graduate preparation should be comprehensive enough to include not only the content knowledge and training but also the personal developmental aspects of the aspiring musician and future music practitioners and professionals. Having a curriculum that embeds soft skills training in existing courses as proposed by Schulz (2008) and MOHE (2006) appears to be the best option to take. The *stand-alone* model to train students in soft skills which was also proposed by MOHE may incur more classroom hours just to focus on specific soft skills, which could very easily be achieved in the music courses students take anyway.

Many music degree programs address both professional (hard) and soft (generic) skills in their aim to produce employable graduates (Bennett, 2008, 2012). For example, degree programs in music trains aspiring music practitioners to communicate well, possess creative thinking abilities, have good interpersonal, leadership and practical skills, who are able to work well with others by displaying good teamwork skills. Music education micro teaching experiences and practicum experiences provide the much-needed, hands-on exposure to the challenges of the teaching profession. Music performance programs train not only future professional musicians and performers to have good technical or hard skills in music but also to have good communication, organisational, creative, problem solving and entrepreneurial skills in preparation for their diverse careers in music.

## **Suggestions for future research**

As this study explored the experiences and perceptions from selected music professionals in Malaysia, further study could expand to include more respondents such as music producers, recording artists, music event managers, music lecturers, radio and television producers, publishers, as well as more alumnus from universities. These experts, through their experiences and hands-on training in the music industry would be able to share valuable insights about the qualities of music professionals who are more likely to survive longer and more successfully in the industry. Subsequent studies could include those also in the recording industry and include in the media publishing fields.

In order to have a better understanding of how music graduates perceive their readiness for careers in music upon graduation as well as their perceived importance of generic soft skills in sustaining their work in music, quantitative feedback should be helpful. A survey instrument thus could be developed and administered to as many music graduates as possible.

Data collection among students in their final year of study and just before they graduate would give a better idea of students' perceptions of their readiness for the world of work and how their tertiary education have helped in the development of their soft skills. Similarly, a longitudinal study of music students from the point of starting their tertiary education until their graduation would help to show the trends in the development of soft skills and subsequently relate to how enrolment in the various programs have helped students prepare for future careers in music.

## **Conclusion**

Much have been said about the complexities of careers in the arts and music (Bennett, Beeching, Perkins, Carruthers & Weller, 2012; Beeching, 2012; Weller,

2012) for educators to understand that training future professionals in these areas require IHLs to be forward thinking and able to match the needs of the industry with the programs offered at tertiary level. Dialogues with alumni about curriculum matters and the relevance of the curriculum in the various music programs to the changing needs of the world of arts and music need to be conducted. Curriculum reviews therefore need to be in line with the changing of the times. A partnership between IHLs and the industry need to be established so that a strong bond and connection is made that will help the survival of graduates.

There is undeniably a strong need for music graduates to be 'job ready', equipped with the necessary training and qualities that can enhance their marketability and employability. These qualities, often overlooked in the past, have become the basic requirement today among employers who seek to have productive employees who can help their organizations grow. There is a strong need for individuals with good soft skills or generic skills which some may refer to as life skills or personal skills which are transferable to any profession. According to Carruthers (2012, p. 87) "musicians must rethink themselves, not only to increase job prospects, but also to garner greater job satisfaction." It is now understood that graduates need to be risk takers, visionary, have lifelong learning interest and explorers of opportunities in order to secure their dream job and be able to make a living out of the hard skills they learned at university. The issues and challenges of being successful in the music area demands perseverance, persistence, courage, resilience, a lot of hard work, and a strong motivation to succeed. This is because talent and musical skills alone are not sufficient to achieve the financial security that one needs to sustain a living in the music industry. Therefore having all the seven soft skills attributes as those mapped out by the ministry are the basic ingredients to achieve one's dreams.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**

**THE UITM'S HOLISTIC GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE MATRIX**

# The UiTM's Holistic Graduate Attribute Matrix

ATTRIBUTES	ACADEMIC DIMENSION	PERSONAL DIMENSION	TRANSFERABLE SKILLS DIMENSION
<b>Reflective Learner</b>	Consider and act upon the ethical, social and global responsibilities of self actions	Possess aspirational goals for continuing personal, professional and career development	Demonstrate ability to identify and articulate self skills, knowledge and understanding confidently and in a variety of contexts
<b>Resourceful and Responsible</b>	Experienced in self-directed learning and authentic research-led enquiry	Possess motivation, drive and diligence to sustain independent work	Demonstrate ability to manage personal performance to meet expectations and demonstrate drive, determination, and accountability.
<b>Effective Communicator</b>	Articulate complex ideas with respect to the needs and abilities of diverse audience. Acceptable English proficiency	Possess communicative skills to deliver ideas clearly and concisely with knowledge on what and how to say	Demonstrate ability to communicate clearly and confidently, and listen critically
<b>Responsive</b>	Cross- cultural education focusing on understanding different cultures, empathy, respect, curiosity, customs, styles of communication. Culturally Responsive	Possess empathy, respect	Demonstrate ability to socialize with people from different walks of life
<b>Ethically and Socially Sensitive</b>	Consider and act upon the ethical, social and global responsibilities of self actions	Possess openness to the richness of multi-cultural and global experiences, opportunities and ways of thinking	Demonstrate practical and contemporary knowledge of relevant professional, ethical and legal frameworks

<b>Creative and Innovative</b>	Exposure to activities that promote creativity	Possess an analytically creative mind that can utilize available sources optimally	Demonstrate the ability to dream, imagine and visualize
<b>Tech-Savvy</b>	Technology, big data	Possess a Global mind	Demonstrate analytical skills using technology.
<b>Adaptable</b>	Experience multi-disciplinary and/or inter-disciplinary learning in an internationally renowned institution	Possess ability to respond flexibly and adapt skills and knowledge to excel in unfamiliar situations fostered within an internationalised community. Understand work and culture.	Demonstrate resilience, perseverance and positivity in multi-tasking, dealing with change and meeting new challenges.
<b>Independent and Critical Thinker</b>	Identify, define and assess complex issues and ideas in a researchable form	Possess critical judgement in evaluating sources of information and constructing meaning	Demonstrate ability to apply creative, imaginative and innovative thinking and ideas to problem solving.
<b>Confident</b>	Defend ideas in a dialogue with peers and challenge disciplinary assumptions	Possess excellent interpersonal and social skills	Demonstrate enthusiasm, leadership and the ability to positively influence others
<b>Systematically Inquisitive</b>	Intellectually curious and engage in the pursuit of new knowledge and understanding	Possess ability to locate, analyse and synthesise information from multiple sources	Demonstrate ability to investigate problems and provide effective solutions.
<b>Solution Provider</b>	Real life case exposure and application of theoretical principles into new contexts	Possess an open and analytical mind and yet be self critical and self evaluative	Demonstrate ability to analyse issues/problems from multiple angles and make suggestions
<b>Experienced Collaborator</b>	Engage with the scholarly community and respect others' views and perspectives.	Possess experience in working in groups and teams of varying sizes and in a variety of roles	Demonstrate ability to work professionally and contribute positively in a team

<b>Entrepreneurial</b>	Exposed to various ways of entrepreneurship	Possess ability to identify opportunity for self-development	Demonstrate ability to plan and manage Online Business
<b>Expert in Field</b>	Understand and respect the values, principles, methods and limitations of their discipline(s). Professional Certification.	Possess a breadth and depth of knowledge within their disciplinary area(s).	Demonstrate professional skills, knowledge and competencies.
<b>Balanced graduate (Intellectual-Spiritual-Emotional)</b>	Academically and ethically sound beings mirroring professionals in the respective fields	Possess wisdom that reflects positive attitudes in knowledge development and creation	Demonstrate maturity of thoughts when responding to multiple inputs and contexts

## APPENDIX B

### LIST OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS OFFERING THE MUSIC CURRICULUM (SOURCE: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTER, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2014)

No	State	No of Secondary Schools Offering the Music Curriculum	No of Secondary Schools (as at 1 July 2013)
1	JOHOR	11	271
2	KEDAH	10	181
3	MELAKA	16	77
4	SELANGOR	16	269
5	NEGERI SEMBILAN	19	117
6	SABAH	40	214
7	TERENGGANU	12	142
8	W.P. LABUAN	3	9
9	W.P. PUTRAJAYA	3	10
10	PULAU PINANG	26	124
11	PERAK	42	242
12	SARAWAK	18	185
13	W.P. KUALA LUMPUR	16	97
14	PAHANG	10	192
15	KELANTAN	15	172
16	PERLIS	8	27
		265	2329

## APPENDIX C

### Perception of professional skills among music practitioners

Research by: Assoc Prof Dr Ghaziah Mohd Ghazali  
Faculty of Music, Universiti Teknologi MARA

#### A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Name:

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2. Age:

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3. Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

4. Year graduated from college/IPT (if applicable):

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5. Qualification: Diploma: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree: \_\_\_\_\_ Others:

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6. Instrument(s) played:

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7. Describe the types of jobs/work you do currently to generate an income?

Full time: \_\_\_\_\_

Part time: \_\_\_\_\_

Casual work: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Once in a while)*

#### B. TRANSITION FROM HIGHER EDUCATION TO PROFESSIONAL CAREER

1. What sort of work did you do after graduation? Describe all jobs/work you did both within and outside of music:

a) Within the first 6 months?

b) From 6 months to a year?

2. How easy or difficult was it to find work after graduation? Describe them according to full time and part time/casual work:

**a) Full time:**

<i>Very easy</i>										<i>Very difficult</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**b) Part time:**

<i>Very easy</i>										<i>Very difficult</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

3. What sort of **difficulties/challenges** did you face finding work after graduation?

How did you overcome them?

4. In your opinion, to what extent did your university/college training prepared you to earn an income after graduation?

<i>Not at all prepared</i>										<i>Very prepared</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

5. What aspects of your training/experience in music acquired at university helped you the **most** to gain work/jobs/contracts after graduation?

6. Can you tell us about any mentors or advisors who helped you during the transition from university to professional work engagements?

**C. PROFESSIONAL CAREER**

1. How happy/satisfied are you with what you do currently? Why and what would you change?

**a) Full time role**

<i>Not satisfied</i>										<i>Very satisfied</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

**b) Part time role**

<i>Not satisfied</i>										<i>Very satisfied</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

2. If you hold more than one paid job, what are your main reasons for this?
3. What do you think are **very important** characteristics/attributes that music professionals/practitioners should have in order to be able to earn a living with music?
- a) **Music** skills/abilities
- b) **Non-music/professional** characteristics/attributes
4. Among the **professional skills** a music practitioner needs to secure and sustain employment, describe the **importance** of each of these skills below. Why?

No		<i>Not impt at all</i>					<i>Very impt</i>
a	Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5	
b	Teamwork skills	1	2	3	4	5	
c	Leadership skills	1	2	3	4	5	
d	Problem solving and critical thinking skills	1	2	3	4	5	
e	Lifelong learning	1	2	3	4	5	
f	Work ethics and professionalism	1	2	3	4	5	
g	Entrepreneurial/business skills ( <i>Negotiation, promotion, marketing, etc</i> )	1	2	3	4	5	
h	Time management skills	1	2	3	4	5	
i	Planning/organizational skills	1	2	3	4	5	
j	Others: _____	1	2	3	4	5	

5. From the same list of skills, indicate which ones you think **YOU have become GOOD** at since being in the industry for a few years.

No		<i>Not good At all</i>					<i>Very good</i>
a	Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5	
b	Teamwork skills	1	2	3	4	5	
c	Leadership skills	1	2	3	4	5	
d	Problem solving and critical thinking skills	1	2	3	4	5	
e	Continuing to learn ( <i>Lifelong learning skills</i> )	1	2	3	4	5	

f	Work ethics and professionalism <i>(sense of responsibility, punctuality, dependability, etc)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
g	Entrepreneurial/business skills <i>(Negotiation, promotion, marketing, etc)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
h	Time management skills	1	2	3	4	5
	Planning/organizational skills	1	2	3	4	5
j	Others:_____	1	2	3	4	5

**D. AS AN EMPLOYER/MANAGER/DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR/MUSIC TEACHER**

1. What **characteristics or attributes** of music graduates/new employees do you look for when recruiting new members? Why?
2. From your encounters/contact with music students/graduates throughout your career, what is your opinion of their **readiness** for music careers in our present society?
3. Among the professional skills needed by music practitioners, rate the TOP THREE you think are the most important to have?
4. To what do you contribute your achievement most in your career today?
5. What do you see yourself doing in the next 5 years? 10 years?

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