

# Arts Workers: Insights into insecure work and career patterns

Survey analysis  
September 2023

Grace McQuilten, Jenny Lye, Chloë Powell  
Joe Hirschberg, Kate MacNeill, and Marnie Badham

## Visual Arts Work

This research was funded in part by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council. The Linkage Project *Ambitious and Fair: strategies for a sustainable arts sector* (LP200100054) is a collaboration between Grace McQuilten, Marnie Badham and Chloë Powell at RMIT University; Kate MacNeill and Jenny Lye at The University of Melbourne; Esther Anatolitis at Test Pattern; and partners the National Association of Visual Arts (NAVA) and the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA).



Citation: McQuilten, G. Lye, Powell, C., J., Hirschberg, J., MacNeill, K., and Badham, M. (September 2023) *Arts workers: insights into insecure work and career patterns*. Visual Arts Work research project, RMIT University and The University of Melbourne.

# Arts Workers: Insights into insecure work and career patterns

## Executive Summary

- Arts workers are most likely to identify as arts professionals.
- Progression through career stages resembles that of the population as a whole.
- There is a clear trend of underemployment for arts workers.
- Arts workers are largely underpaid, earning significantly less than other working professionals, with an average annual income of \$51,196 from their arts work, compared to \$92,029 for the general population.<sup>1</sup> (see the footnote added below)
- Arts workers tend to be around the same age as the working population as a whole and predominantly female.
- There is a significant issue of unpaid work in the visual arts and craft sectors, as both volunteer time and additional work within one's role often going unpaid.
- At 23.3%, the gender pay gap for female arts workers is much higher than Australia's gender pay gap of 13.3%.
- Work insecurity is exacerbated by visa conditions and lack of cultural safety for many culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) arts workers.
- The prevalence of people with disability active in arts work (10.7%) is slightly higher than that for the general workforce (9.3%), but significantly lower than that for the population as a whole (17.7%).
- Arts workers note the importance of arts grant funding for organisations and its direct link to the stability of their employment. Arts workers who do apply for grants are more likely to be early or mid-career, often using the funds to deliver projects that contribute to their professional development.

---

<sup>1</sup> The definition of "professional worker" is based on the occupational definition outlined by The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), available on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/how-anzsko-works>

## Introduction

This paper is the second in a series of reports on a survey undertaken in 2022 as part of *Visual Arts Work: sustainable strategies for the Australian visual arts and craft sector*. This large-scale research project looks at the incomes and career lifecycles of visual and craft artists and arts workers in Australia.

The survey sought information on sources of income and modes of work and employment over two separate financial years: 2018-2019 and 2020-2021. The prevalence of people working in multiple jobs both within and outside of the visual arts and craft sector is well known. A central purpose for undertaking this research was to better understand the circumstances contributing to the hybridity of artists and arts workers' careers, and to provide practical recommendations for policy interventions.

The previous paper, *Insights into the hybrid and diverse incomes and career patterns of visual and craft artists*, reported on the experience of respondents who identified primarily as visual and craft artists. In this paper, we examine the results of those (179) respondents who identified primarily as arts workers. Future papers will explore the hybrid nature of practices in the Australian visual arts and craft sector.

We begin by outlining a definition of arts worker that we adopted in the *Visual Arts Work* research project. Next, we provide details of the survey methodology and demographics of the respondents. We then report on the data—arts workers' incomes, career development, employment circumstances, and engagement with general and, given the dominance of the pandemic in the survey period, COVID-19 specific arts funding programs. A discussion of broader findings, policy implications, and areas of further research concludes the paper.

## What is an Arts Worker?

In the context of this survey, the term *arts worker* refers to those in the visual arts and craft sector who contribute to the development and delivery of cultural activity in a range of ways and in different contexts. Often, their work supports visual and craft artists to access opportunities or realise particular goals, such as curators, technicians, and gallery staff, who work with artists to present exhibitions. Educators also comprise a significant portion of this group; training artists in the conceptual and technical aspects of making art, they are often artists themselves.

With recent conversations around the labour involved in creative practice, some artists are describing themselves as arts workers, acknowledging their practice is also a form of work though it is not immediately understood as such by the broader population. While this is interesting in the broader context, for the purposes of our survey we have adopted a more conventional division between artist and arts worker.

One of the difficulties in defining and understanding the role of arts workers is the lack of research into and literature on this group. Available data on the number of arts workers in Australia is inconsistent due to the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes an arts worker.

Government data is likely to underestimate the number. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) *Census* classifies a respondent's occupation based on the 'main job held in the previous week' (Australian Census of Population and Housing, 2021<sup>2</sup>). The work of arts workers, who often hold multiple jobs to maintain an income, may be omitted by this definition if they had been working most of their time in another role in the week prior to the Census. In examining the circumstances of arts workers as a standalone group, our survey is the largest scholarly study into this cohort in Australia to date.

Another issue in defining arts workers is that some in this group do not necessarily identify as such. For example, people working in cultural teams within local council or state government, such as gallery staff or arts project managers, often define themselves as council workers or public servants. While this is accurate in terms of the source of their employment, it doesn't reflect the significant role they play in the arts ecology.

For the purposes of our survey, we worked with existing Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation (ANZSCO) definitions and categories to identify those professionals that may be considered arts workers.<sup>3</sup> Arts workers spend at least some of their paid working time in one or more of the following categories: arts professional (e.g. curator, gallerist, creative producer); arts technician (e.g. studio technician, exhibition installer); arts educator (e.g. lecturer, workshop leader); arts researcher (e.g. academic, market analyst); cultural advisor; community arts and cultural development; and designer (e.g. graphic designer, web/digital designer).

## Part 1: Survey and Sample Demographics

Of the 702 respondents to the survey, 179 or 25.5% self-identified primarily as an arts worker (e.g., curator; technician; arts educator etc.) regardless of their main source of income or where they spent the majority of their working hours.

### Demographic Characteristics of Arts Workers

Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of our survey of arts workers.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of arts worker respondents (a)

	Current survey Arts Workers	Census 2021 Australian Working Population aged 20+ <sup>a</sup>
Observations	179	11,963,052
Mean Age	44	42
Median Age	43	43
%65+	6.1%	5.1%
Gender (Male%)	10.7%	51.8%

<sup>2</sup> 2021 Census, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data>

<sup>3</sup> ANZSCO, Australian Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/how-anzsco-works>

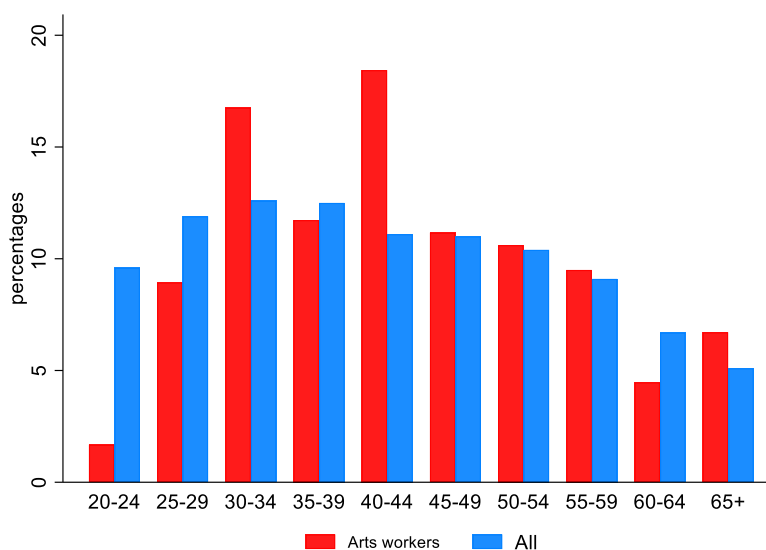
Gender (Female%)	86.4%	48.2%
Nonbinary/Prefer not to say <sup>b</sup>	3%	
Born Australia	75.7%	65.7%
Single, no dependents	21.8%	
Single, dependents	4.5%	
Married or living with partner, no dependents	27.4%	
Married or living with partner, dependents	25.7%	
Other <sup>c</sup>	20.6%	
Capital city	71.4%	69.3%
Regional city/town	24.7%	
Rural/remote	3.9%	
Language other than English	13.5%	24.1% <sup>d</sup>
Disability	10.7%	9.3% <sup>e</sup>

- a. Data retrieved for those aged 20 and over using Australian Census TableBuilder see:  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/tablebuilder?opendocument&navpos=240>
- b. Only a male/female breakdown is available in the Census.
- c. The current survey includes information about shared households of adults.
- d. Language other than English used at home.
- e. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/employment/labour-force-participation> this data relates to people aged 15 and above.

## Age

The percentage of survey respondents and all workers by age group is shown in Figure 2<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 2: Age distribution of Arts Workers and the Australian Working Population



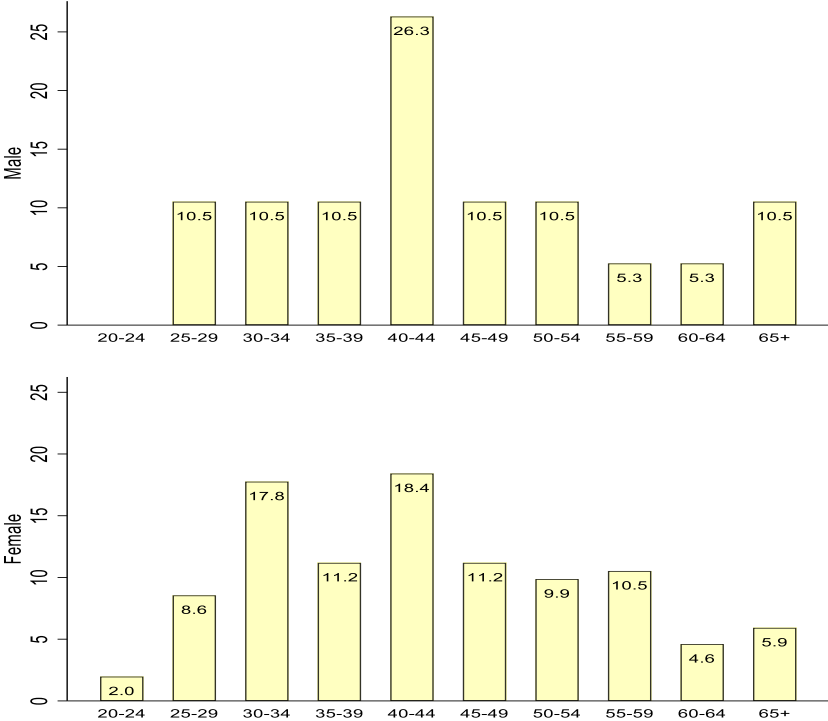
<sup>4</sup> The percentage in age groups for all workers was computed using 6291.0.55.001 – LM1 – Labour force status by Age, Greater Capital City and Rest of State (ASGS), Marital status and Sex, February 1978 onwards.

The mean age for arts workers in our sample is 44 and the median age is 43. The largest cohort is the 40-44 age group followed by 30-34 and 6.1% of the sample is 65 and older. This is similar to all workers in the general population, where the mean age is 43 and the median age is 42. The largest cohorts of workers in the general population is between the 30-39 age groups and 5.1% of all workers are 65 and older. However, unlike all workers, there are very few arts workers between the ages of 20-24.

**Gender**

The sample is predominantly female (86.4%), 10.7% were male, 1% identified as non-binary and 2% preferred not to state their gender. With only two respondents identifying as non-binary, we don't seek to draw conclusions or make generalisations from these responses but include them in the analysis for reference.

**Figure 3: Distribution of age groups by gender**



The mean age of females was 44 and males was 46. There are some differences in the age profiles between males and females. There are more males in the 40-44 and 65+ age groups and more women in the 30-34 and 55-59 age groups.

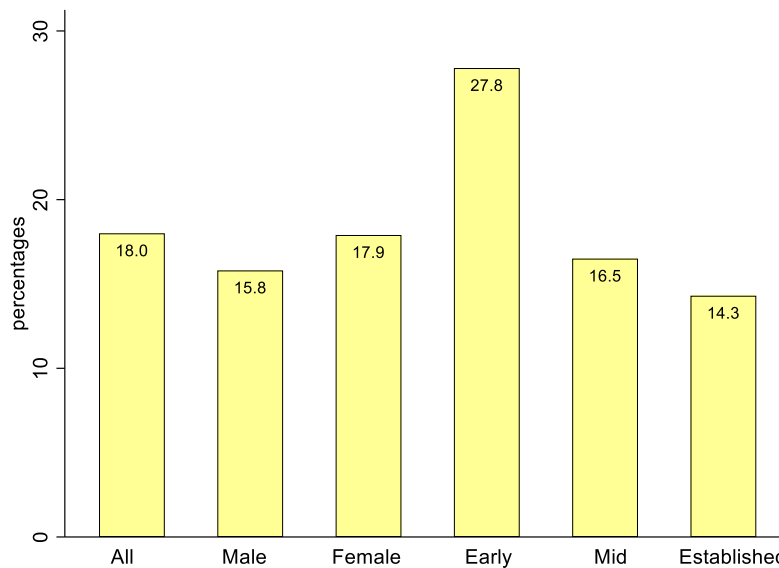
The top three areas of work were the same for males and females – Arts professionals (females 73%, males 53%), Arts educators (females 39%, males 42%), and Community arts and cultural development workers (females 25%, males 26%).

### Place of birth and culturally and linguistically diverse

Almost 76% of the sample of arts workers were born in Australia. The next largest group (9%) were born in the United Kingdom. This was similar across males and females. As shown in Figure 4, around 18% identify as having a culturally and linguistically diverse background<sup>5</sup>. CALD arts workers were more likely to identify as being at an early career stage than mid and established career stages.

Over 80% of CALD arts workers agreed that there were barriers to participating in the visual arts and craft sector relating to their background. Specifically, low incomes and wages are a barrier for CALD arts workers, as well as language, visa/residency status, and cultural attitudes.

Figure 4: Percentage identifying as having a cultural and linguistically diverse background



### Location

Table 2 shows the distribution of location of arts workers according to career stage. 71% of arts workers in the sample live in a capital city, 25% live in a regional city or town and 4% live in a rural or remote community. Established arts workers are more likely to live in a rural or remote community.

<sup>5</sup> Coined by the ABS in 1999, the term 'Cultural and Linguistic Diversity' was used to acknowledge "linguistic and cultural characteristics of multicultural populations living in Australia" (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity; Australian Bureau of Statistics: Canberra, Australia, 1999). These characteristics are defined as whether a person living in Australia was born overseas, has one or more parents who were born overseas, and/or speaks a language other than English at home. In recent years, the term has been queried and largely renounced by many in the arts and cultural sector for its inherent bias towards Anglo-Celtic people as the primary culture. The researchers recognise that CALD is not the preferred term but have adopted in this project to enable comparison to ABS data.

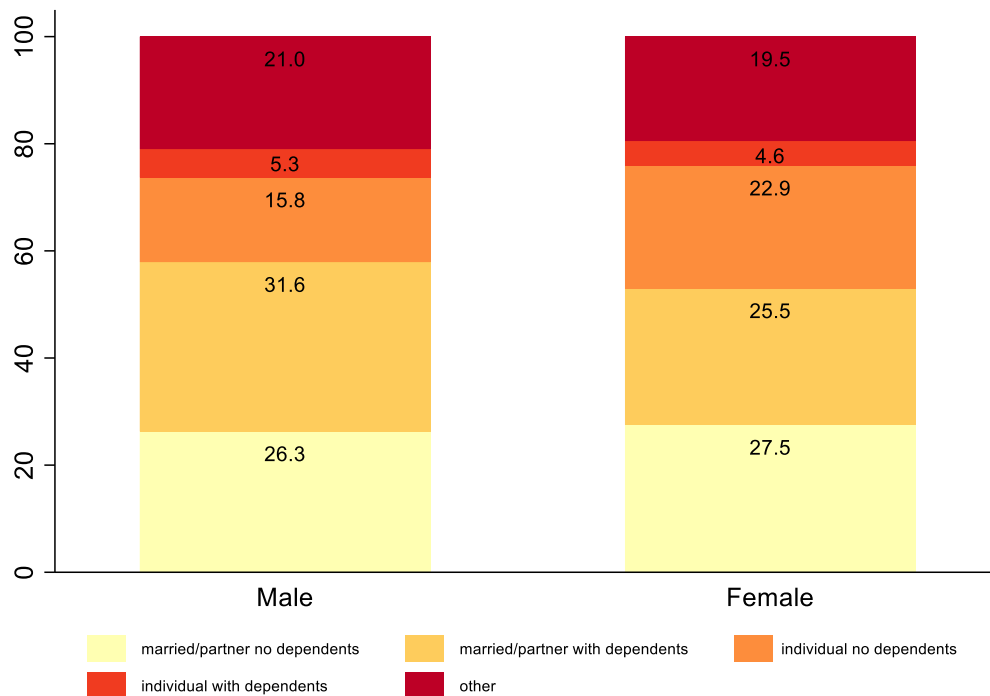
Table 2: Location of arts workers (%)

Type	Capital City	Regional city or town	Rural or remote
All	71.4	24.7	3.9
Early	72.2	22.2	5.6
Mid	80.0	16.5	3.5
Established	57.9	38.6	3.5
Male	79.0	21.1	0.0
Female	70.4	25.7	4.0

### Household type

As shown in Figure 5, 37% of males live in households with dependents<sup>6</sup> compared to 31% of females. We discuss the possible reasons for and implications of this in the Discussion section.

Figure 5: Household types by gender



### Disability

In Australia, around 9.3% of the working age population have a disability. In our sample, 10.7% identified as having a disability (male 10.5% and females 9.2%), slightly higher than for the workforce as a whole. Nearly 90% agreed that there were barriers to participation in the visual arts and craft sector for people with disability. Common themes identified by respondents were a lack of adjustments and support in the workplace, and discrimination.

<sup>6</sup> For our survey, we provided a definition of dependents as being ‘children or people you care for’.



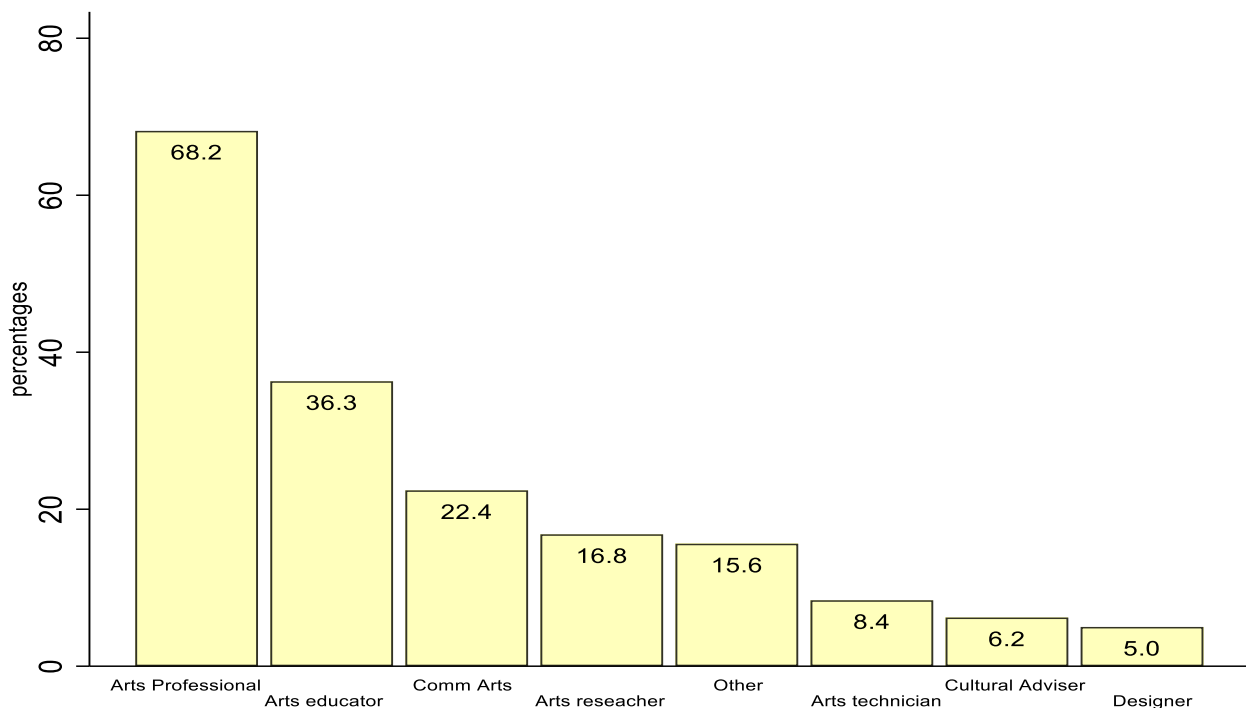
## Part 2: Survey Results

### Areas of Arts Work

Respondents were then asked to select their area of arts work. Definitions were not provided in the survey but examples of each area of work were given<sup>7</sup>. Multiple options could be selected, in recognition of the fact that many arts workers have more than one job. The responses are illustrated in Figure 1.

The most selected area of work was arts professional (68.2%) followed by arts educator (36.3%) and community arts and cultural development worker (22.4%). In addition to these, some respondents selected 'Other' with the option to provide further detail. A range of areas of work were noted in their responses, including arts-related retail, communications and marketing, graphic design, and working in the care industries, specifically mental health, and disability.

Figure 1: Main Area of Arts Work<sup>a</sup>



a. Multiple responses allowed.

### Time spent on Arts Work

As shown in Figure 6, arts workers spent the majority (78.2%) of their working time on arts work; a similar pattern across gender and arts worker career stage. Male arts workers allocated a

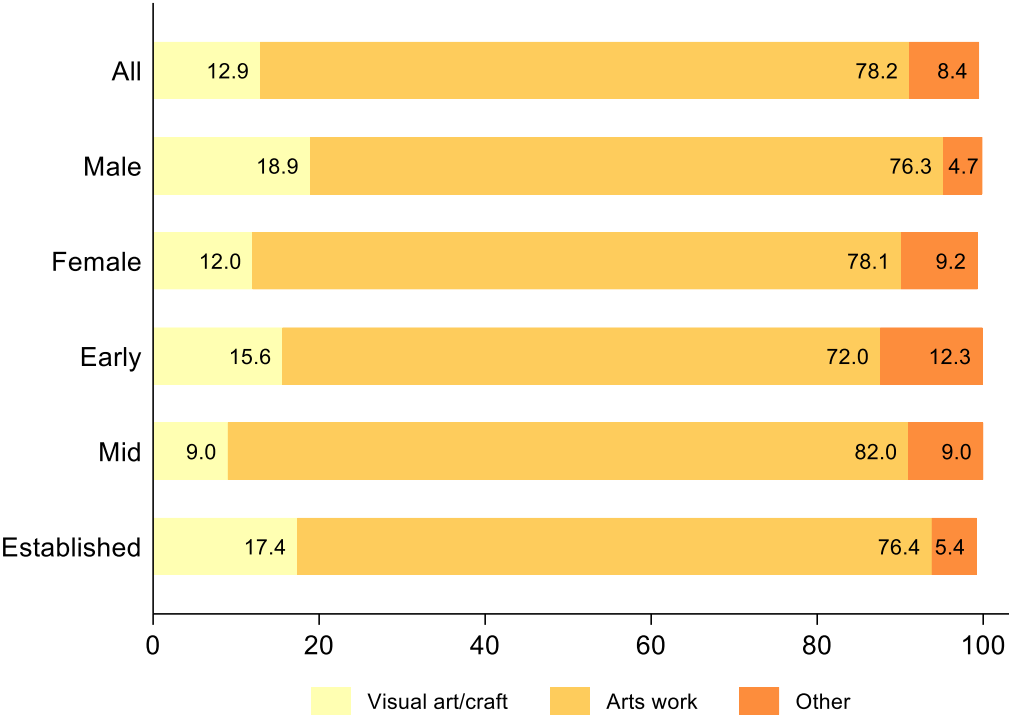
<sup>7</sup> Examples include Arts Professional (e.g. curator, arts writer, gallerist), Arts Technician (e.g. studio technician, fabricator, exhibition installer), and Arts Educator (e.g. lecturer, workshop leader, private teacher).

greater proportion of their time to their arts practice than do female arts workers, and less time to work outside the visual arts and craft sector than do female arts workers.

Mid-career arts workers and female arts workers reported spending less time on their arts practice, while early career arts workers are spending more time on other work. Male arts workers and established arts workers reported spending less time on other work.

This suggests greater hybridity for female arts workers and early to mid-career arts workers. We explore possible reasons for this in the Discussion section.

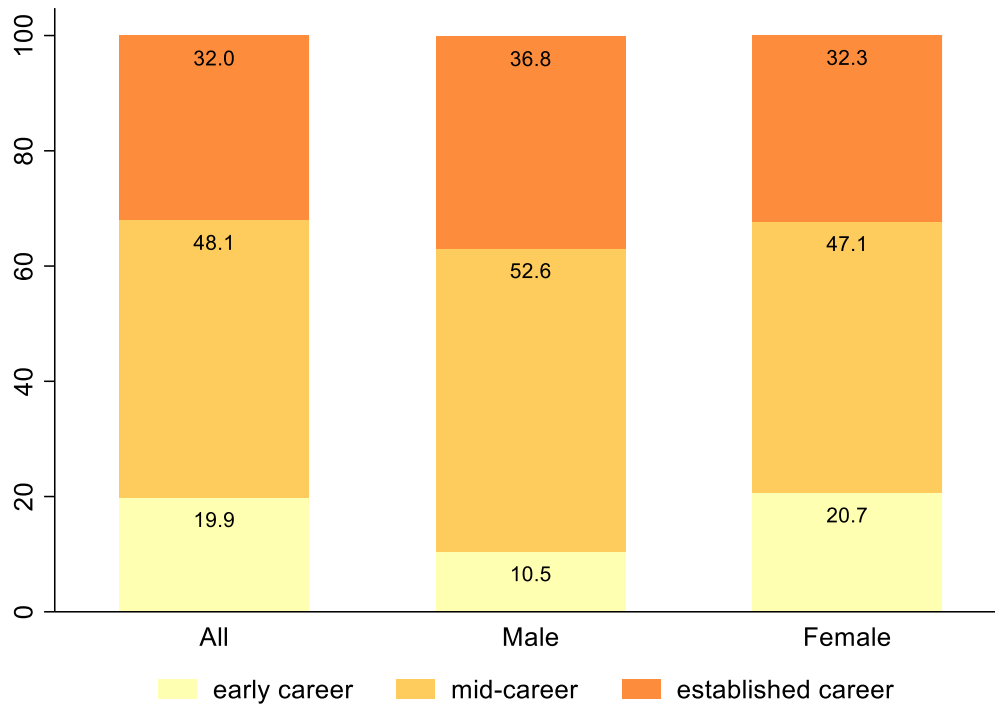
Figure 6: Average percentage of working time



Career Stage

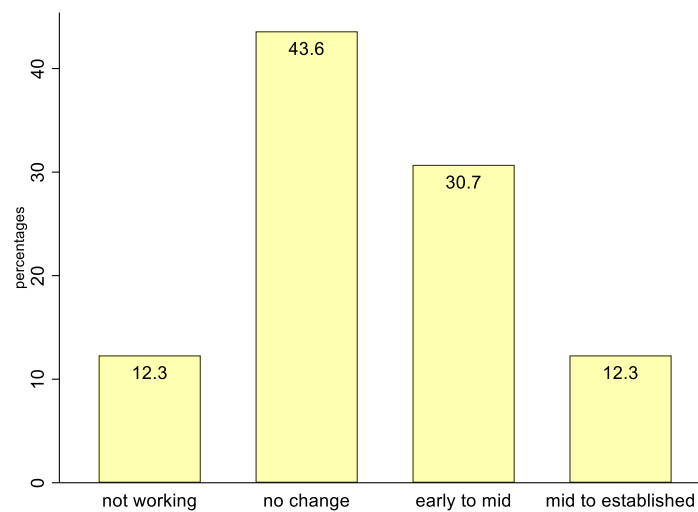
Respondents were asked how they would describe their career stage at the time of completing the survey. No definitions were provided, rather the respondent was free to nominate where they thought they were in their career. Overall, 19.9% identified as being early career arts workers, 48.1% mid-career, and 32% identified as established arts workers. This pattern was similar across both males and females. Those identifying as early career were on average aged 35, mid-career were on average aged 42 and established arts workers were on average aged 55.

Figure 7: Career Stage



### Changes in Career stage

Figure 8: Changes in career stage

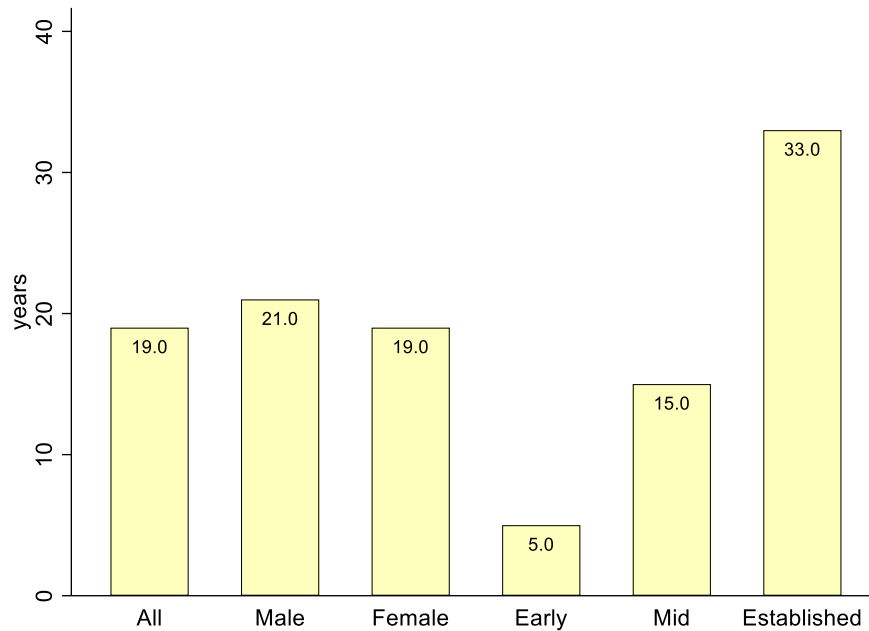


Respondents were then asked to describe their career stage five years previous (2017). Almost 44% of the sample did not indicate a change in career stage between 2017 and 2021. However, there was greater movement from early to mid-career (30.7%) than from mid-career to

established (12.3%). This suggests a pathway for early to mid-career progression for arts workers, but a narrowing of opportunities at the higher levels.

### Years worked as an Arts Worker

Figure 9: Length of time worked as arts worker



On average, arts workers had been working for 19 years. This was similar across males and females; however, it differed by career stage. Those who classified themselves as early career had on average worked as an arts worker for 5 years, mid-career 15 years, and established 33 years. The majority of males (72%) and females (76%) who identified as established reported working in the arts for 20+ years.

### Education and Training related to Arts Work

Survey results indicate that arts workers are a highly educated workforce. As shown in Table 3, all arts workers had high levels of undergraduate and post-graduate education related to their arts work across both gender and career stage. This is much higher than the general population. In 2022, 32.1% of people aged 15-74 had a Bachelor degree or higher qualification, compared to 68.7% of arts workers surveyed for this research. On average, 8.3% of the general population had a Postgraduate degree as their highest qualification<sup>8</sup>, seven times lower than arts workers at 59.8%. A large percentage of arts workers had also participated in collective and community activity in the sector. Only 1% of arts workers had no education and training at all related to their arts work.

<sup>8</sup> Data source: Education and Workforce, 2022, TableBuilder.

Table 3: Education and Training related to arts work (%)<sup>a</sup>

	All	Male	Female	Early	Mid	Established
Undergraduate education	68.7	68.4	69.3	75.0	68.6	64.9
Postgraduate education	59.8	52.6	60.1	41.7	73.3	50.9
Currently undertaking study/training	12.9	5.3	14.4	27.8	7.0	12.3
Private classes/workshops	38	26.3	40.5	44.4	34.9	38.6
Collective activity/peer learning	33	21.1	35.3	27.8	38.4	28.1
Community activity/centre	19	15.8	20.3	22.2	18.6	17.5
None	1.1	0	1.3	0	2.3	0
Other	11.2	10.5	11.1	11.1	9.3	11.2

a. Multiple responses allowed.

## Employment Type

Figure 10: Employment type

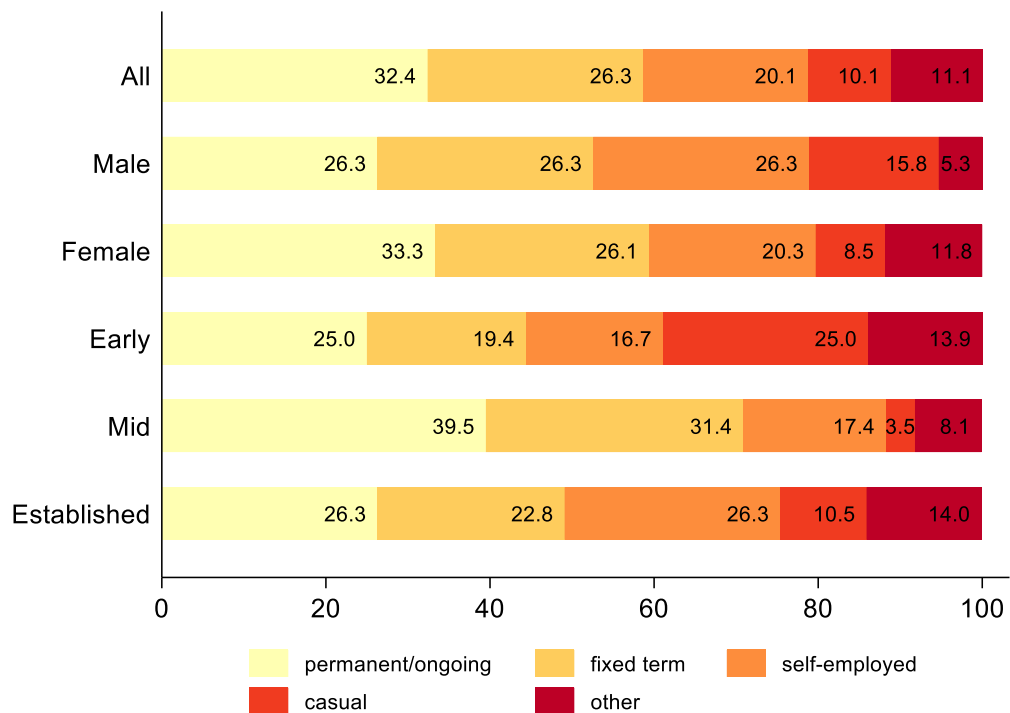


Figure 10 shows the type of employment for arts workers. Overall, 20% were self-employed however this was higher for males at 26%. This is also higher than the average rate of self-employment in Australia, which is 16.6% overall and 20.1% for males.

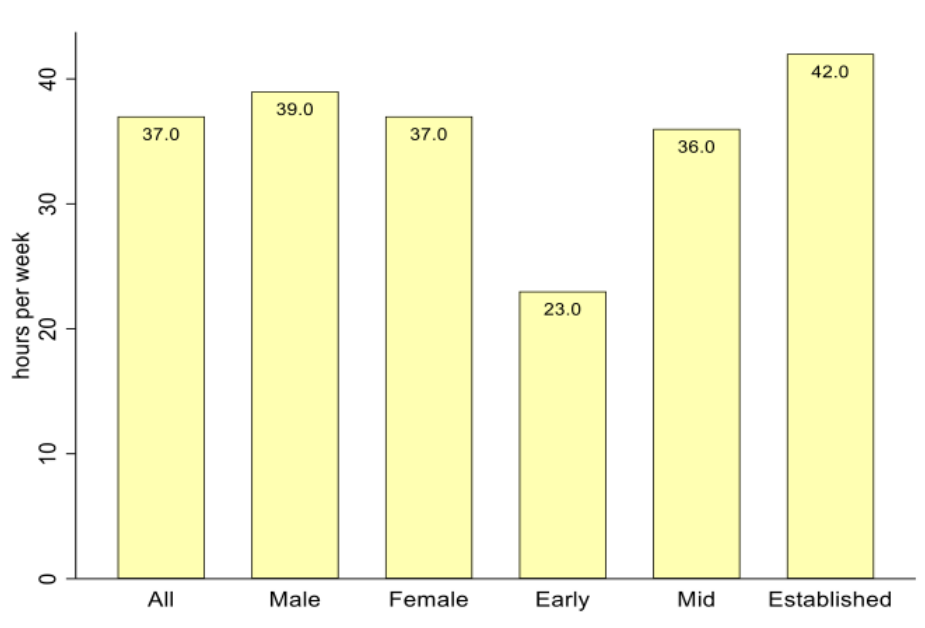
Further, where 10% of arts workers overall were employed on a casual basis, this was significantly higher for the early career group at 25%. Almost a third of the whole group had permanent or ongoing positions although this was lower for males, early career, and established arts workers. 26% of respondents were in fixed-term positions (short term contracts, not ongoing), although this was again lower for early career and higher for mid-career arts workers. This rate of fixed-term contracts is significantly higher than the Australian average of 3.4%, which indicates lack of ongoing job security for arts workers<sup>9</sup>.

Overall, mid-career arts workers were more likely to have stable employment, either with permanent/ongoing or fixed-term positions. Early career arts workers were more likely to be casual and less likely to have stable employment.

Of those casually employed, over one third selected the main reason being that employment on a permanent, ongoing basis was unavailable. Of those that were self-employed, half selected flexibility and independence as the main reasons for being so. On average, they had been self-employed for around 11 years.

### Income and hours worked

Figure 11: Hours spent per week on Arts Work



On average, arts workers spend around 37 hours per week on their arts work. While this is similar across males and females, those who identified as being established in their career spend on average 42 hours per week compared to those who are early career, who spend an average of

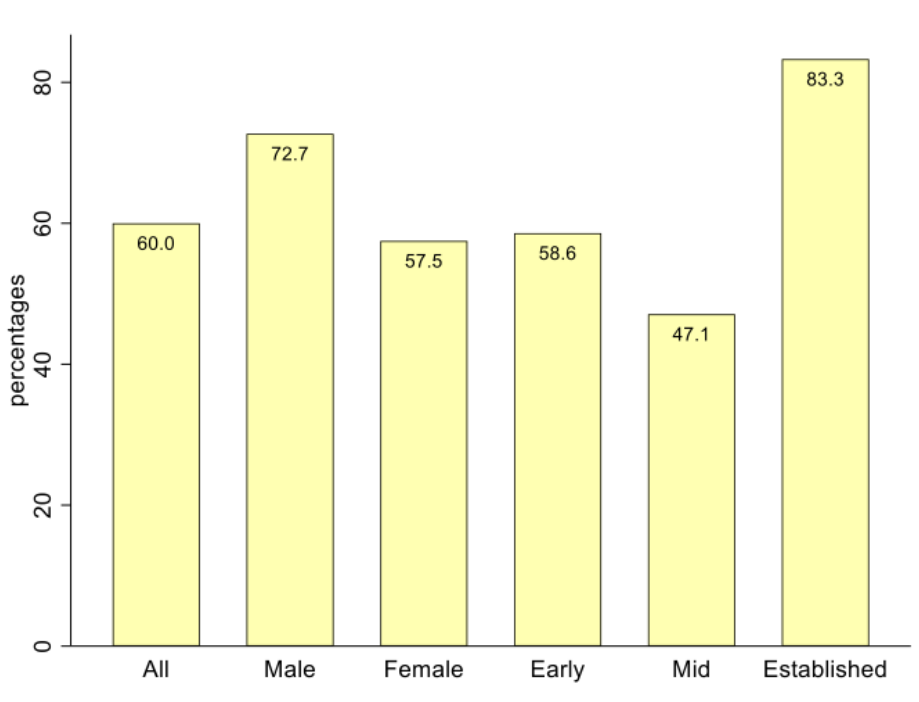
<sup>9</sup> Fixed-term contracts 3.4% and casual 23% employees (Aug 2022).

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/working-arrangements/latest-release>

23 hours per week on arts work, perhaps reflecting the mostly casual nature of their employment.

As shown in Figure 12, more than half (60%) responded that they would work more hours in paid employment if it was available. This was higher for males (72.7%) and those who had established careers as arts workers (83.3%). This points to an issue of under-employment for arts workers.

Figure 12: Percentage would work more hours of employment if available



### Arts workers' incomes

Overall, arts workers are earning significantly less than other working professionals, with an average annual income of \$51,196 for an average of 37 hours per week from arts work, compared to \$92,029 for average full-time earnings for the general population.<sup>10</sup> There is a significant difference in mean and median incomes for arts workers by career stage. Early career arts workers reported a mean income of \$31,271 compared to mid-career, which was \$55,212, and established, which was \$62,015. Male arts workers reported a mean income of \$68,885, noticeably higher than female arts workers who reported a mean income \$52,858. This represents a gender pay gap of 23.3%.

The mean and median incomes from work as an arts worker for the financial years 2018/2019 and 2020/2021 are reported in Table 4. All groups saw falls between 2018/2019 and 2020/21 in both mean and median income. The overall fall in average income was 5% although males saw

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia/may-2022#:~:text=Media%20releases-,Key%20statistics,%2C%20and%20%241%2C523.60%20\(private\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia/may-2022#:~:text=Media%20releases-,Key%20statistics,%2C%20and%20%241%2C523.60%20(private))

the biggest fall with 14.5%. Early career arts workers saw a fall of almost 21% in their median arts worker income.

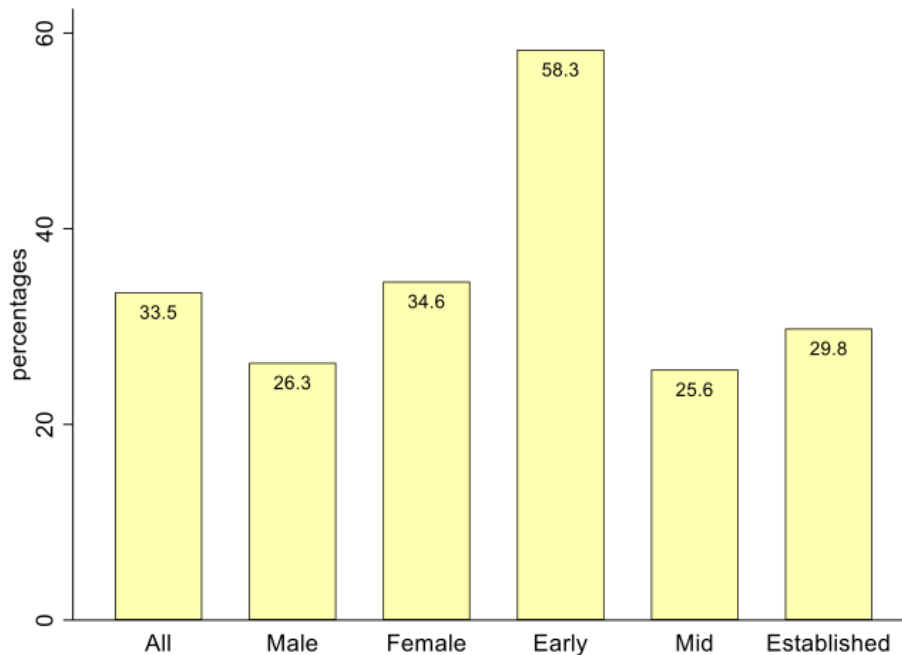
Table 4: Mean and Median Incomes from Arts Work

Type	2018/19 Mean (\$)	2020/21 Mean (\$)	%diff Means	2018/19 Median (\$)	2020/21 Median (\$)	%diff Medians
All	53,744	51,196	-4.7	56,333	48,442	-14.0
Early	31,567	31,271	-0.9	33,800	26,780	-20.8
Mid	55,212	54,559	-1.2	58,500	52,999	-9.4
Established	62,015	58,653	-5.4	63,917	57,953	-9.3
Male	68,885	58,912	-14.5	65,000	45,067	-30.7
Female	52,858	50,619	-4.2	56,680	49,600	-12.5

### Other Income

As shown in Figure 13, around a third of respondents earned income from sources outside of the visual arts and craft sector. However, this is much higher for early career arts workers, with over a half earning income from work outside of the arts.

Figure 13: Percentage earn income from sources outside of visual arts and craft sector



The table below shows the sources of this other income. Other employment, such as local government arts-related work, arts teaching overseas, tertiary education, and arts work (not-visual arts), was the most selected option, particularly for early career arts workers.



With almost 40% of early career arts workers sourcing income from other employment, and 11% of whom selected scholarships compared to 3.4% overall, this indicates a high number of arts workers are pursuing higher education while working both within and outside of the visual arts and craft sector.

Table 5: Sources of other income (%)<sup>a</sup>

	All	Male	Female	Early	Mid	Established
Other employment	21.2	15.8	21.6	38.9	16.3	17.5
Government support	5.0	5.3	5.2	2.8	4.7	7.0
Private income	2.2	5.3	2.0	2.8	1.2	3.5
Family support	2.8	0	3.3	5.6	3.5	0
Scholarships	3.4	0	3.9	11.1	2.3	0
Other	7.3	10.5	7.2	8.3	16.3	7.0

a. Multiple responses allowed.

### Unpaid work

Arts workers are reporting high levels of unpaid work in the visual arts and craft sector (45.9%) with 61.5% of respondents in our sample participating in unpaid work in the arts sector including volunteering on boards, in artist-run initiatives, on self-managed projects, in family arts-related business, and mentoring. Table 6 reports the percentage of arts workers in each group who participate in unpaid work as well as the average total number of hours each month spent on this work. On average, arts workers spend 25.5 hours each month on unpaid work. This is higher for males, at around 40 hours on average.

Table 6: Participation in unpaid work

Type	% participating	Average total hours each month
All	61.5	25.5
Male	73.7	40.0
Female	59.5	21.7
Early	58.3	27.8
Mid	60.5	22.5
Established	64.9	28.4

Of those participating in unpaid work, the average number of hours spent in each area per month are broken down in Table 7. More hours are spent each month on average on self-managed projects, with early career arts workers spending an average of 11 hours each month and males 14.6 hours per month. Overall, arts workers spend an average of around 4.4 hours of unpaid work on artist-run initiatives. Established arts workers spend 8.4 hours on mentoring each month compared to 4.5 hours on average overall. There is a much higher number of unpaid hours in the

areas of family-related business and self-managed projects for male arts workers than for female arts workers. Males spend on average 8.8 hours each month on family arts-related business and 14.6 hours on self-managed projects compared to 1.6 hours and 8.9 hours overall.

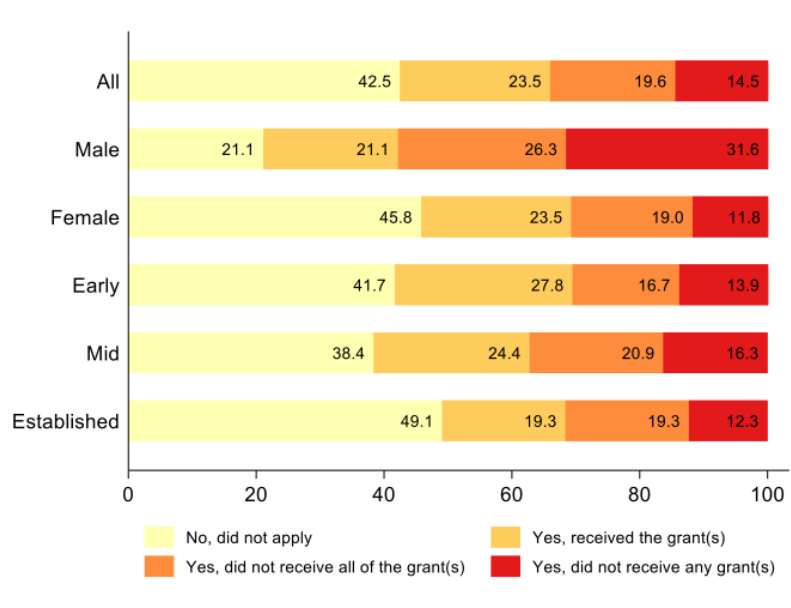
Table 7: Average hours each month for those participating in unpaid work

Type	All	Male	Female	Early	Mid	Established
Artist-run initiatives	4.4	5.6	3.2	5.0	5.7	2.2
Boards	4.3	4.1	4.2	6.7	3.3	4.5
Self-managed projects	8.9	14.6	7.9	11.1	8.8	7.9
Family arts-related business	1.6	8.8	0.5	0	0.2	4.3
Mentoring	4.5	4.4	4.1	1.2	3.0	8.4
Other	1.8	2.5	1.8	3.8	1.5	1.1

### Grant Funding

Figure 14 illustrates arts workers’ experience with grant funding. Almost 43% of the sample had not applied for any grants. Around 15% of arts workers had not received at least some of the grants applied for, although for males this was almost 32%.

Figure 14: Experience with grant funding (%)



As shown in Table 8, the most common funding agencies applied to were State Government art funders, Local Government art funders, and the Federal arts funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts (now Creative Australia<sup>11</sup>). Both established and mid-career arts workers were more

<sup>11</sup> Established from 1 July 2023 as part of the Labour government’s cultural policy, Revive.

likely to have applied to Local Government art funders and the Australia Council than early career arts workers. Almost 10% overall had applied to a philanthropic organisation.

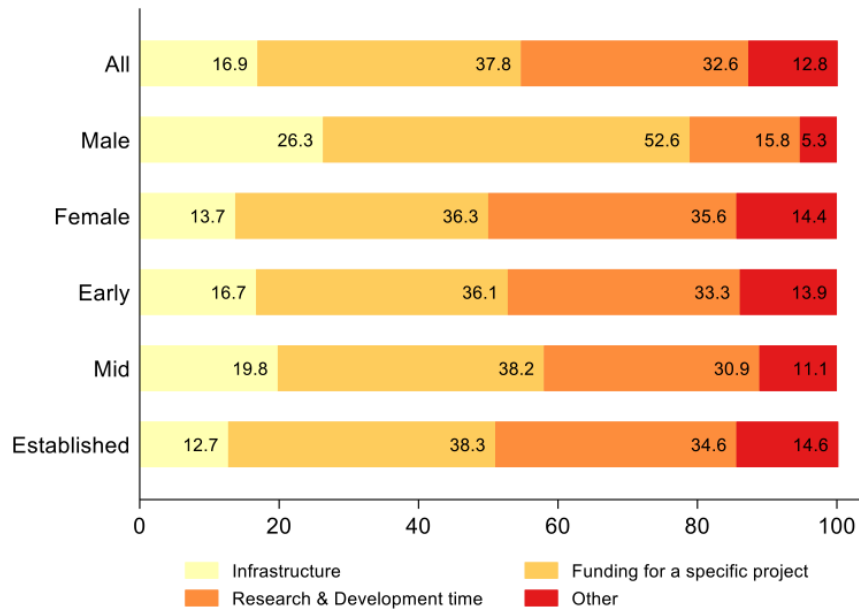
Table 8: Funding organisation applied<sup>a</sup>

	All	Male	Female	Early	Mid	Established
State Government Art Funders	39.8	53.3	38.6	38.1	41.5	37.9
Local Government Art Funders	25.2	40.0	24.1	19.1	26.4	27.6
Australia Council for the Arts	25.2	33.3	25.3	19.1	30.2	20.7
Philanthropic Organisation	9.7	6.7	10.8	4.8	9.4	13.8
Creative Partnership Australia	2.9	6.7	2.4	0	1.9	6.9
Commonwealth Office for the Arts	5.8	6.7	4.8	4.8	1.9	13.8
Other	8.7	6.7	7.2	14.3	7.6	6.9

a. Multiple responses allowed.

Figure 15 highlights responses as to where financial support from grants was seen as being most beneficial. Almost 40% of arts workers preferred funding for a specific project followed by another 33% that preferred research and development time. This was a similar pattern across career stage and gender.

Figure 15: Financial support most beneficial (%)



Challenges of and barriers to applying for arts grant funding are recorded in Table 9. Multiple selections were allowed in response to this question. The amount of administration and/or time taken to prepare applications was seen as the most common barrier to applying for grants.

Almost 50% selected the next two major barriers as being funding priorities/criteria not matching projects or practice, and the amount of funding available. A quarter also selected not having a strong enough track record of receiving grants as a barrier. This was significantly higher for early career arts workers (40%). 20% of respondents selected application timelines and 10% project timelines as barriers to applying for grants.

Table 9: Challenges/barriers to arts grants (%)<sup>a</sup>

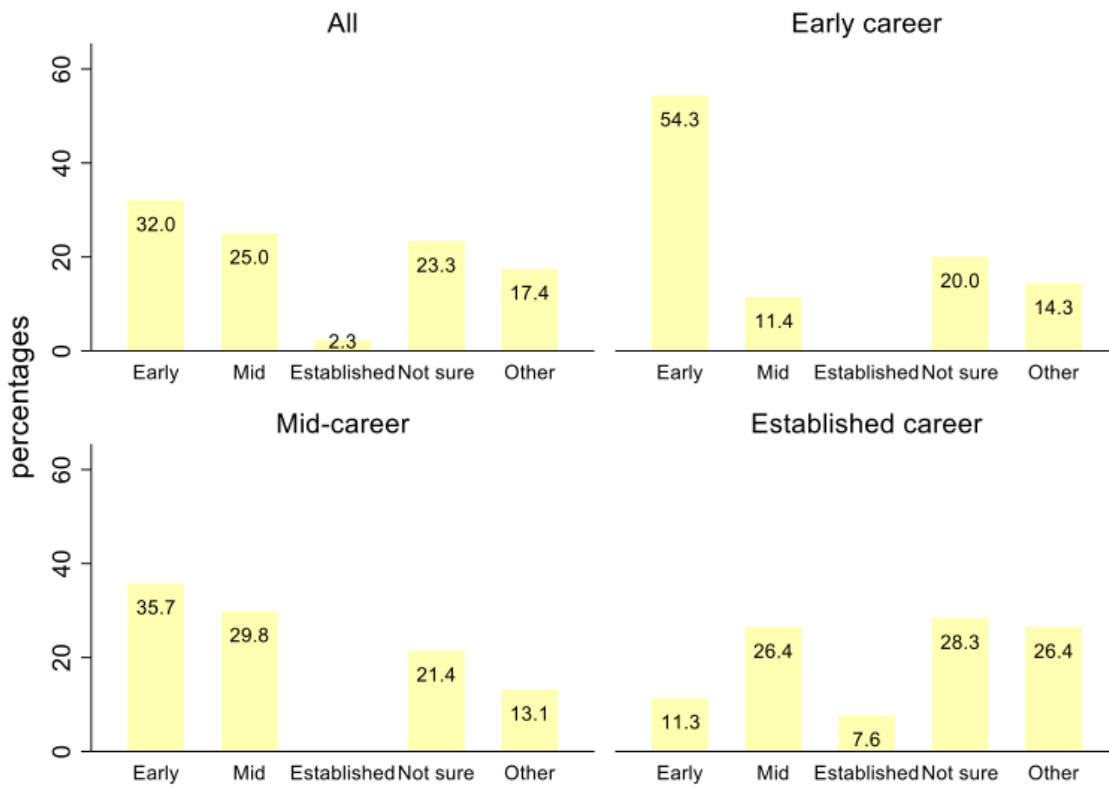
	All	Male	Female	Early	Mid	Established
Admin/time to prepare application	60.3	89.5	56.9	61.1	68.6	47.4
Funding priorities don't match	40.8	21.1	43.1	36.1	38.4	47.4
Amount funding available	46.9	63.2	44.4	47.2	51.2	40.4
Track record	25.7	31.6	24.8	38.9	25.6	17.5
Application timelines	20.1	21.1	19.0	25.0	22.1	14.0
Project timelines	9.5	10.5	9.8	8.3	11.6	7.0
Contract terms & conditions	5.0	0	5.2	5.6	5.8	3.5
Other	21.2	21.1	22.2	19.4	15.1	31.6

a. Multiple responses allowed.

Figure 16 illustrates responses to the question “*At what stage of your career or practice do you feel grant funding would be or has been most valuable?*”. Around 30% of both mid-career and established arts workers selected the mid-career stage as the time in their career that they felt funding was the most beneficial. Only 2.3% of the overall sample selected the established career stage.

Looking at the responses by career stage, each group nominated grant support as being most beneficial at early or mid-career, and least beneficial at established. More than half (54.7%) of the established career group listed ‘Other’ or were unsure of the most beneficial career stage to receive grant funding.

Figure 16: Career Stage funding most beneficial (%)



### Pandemic Impacts

Percentages of arts workers who received assistance through the COVID-19 pandemic are reported in Table 10. A large proportion of the sample (44%) received no assistance. This was slightly lower for early career arts workers (38.9%).

JobKeeper payments were the most likely form of assistance received, with 26.8% receiving these payments. This was higher for early career arts workers (38.9%) and lower for males (15.8%) and established career arts workers (15.8%). Those who received JobKeeper payments were on average younger (40) than those who did not (46) and their mean arts worker income pre-COVID (2018-2019) was much lower (\$44,515 versus \$57,294). 13.4% received the Coronavirus supplement although this was much higher for early career arts workers (25%). Around 6% across career stage and gender accessed their superannuation during the pandemic.

This scheme has been shown by Wang-Ly and Newell (2022)<sup>12</sup> to have been primarily accessed by individuals who genuinely needed financial support<sup>13</sup>. In our sample, the average age of those withdrawing from their superannuation was 40, which was similar to the general population where it was 38 (Taylor 2021).

While overall around 6.7% accessed quick response business grants, this was higher for males (15.9%). This finding is consistent with male arts workers spending more time on family-related arts businesses than female arts workers. No early career arts workers accessed these grants.

Table 10: Assistance received due to COVID-19 pandemic (%)<sup>a</sup>

	All	Male	Female	Early	Mid	Established
None	44.7	47.4	44.4	38.9	46.5	45.6
Received JobKeeper	26.8	15.8	26.8	38.9	29.1	15.8
Received any stimulus Government payment	9.5	5.3	9.8	11.1	10.5	7.0
Received Coronavirus supplement	13.4	15.8	13.1	25.0	12.8	7.0
Found an alternative source of income	15.1	21.1	15.0	27.8	11.6	12.3
Early access superannuation scheme	6.2	5.3	6.5	5.6	5.8	7.0
Accessed quick response business grants	6.7	15.8	5.9	0	8.1	8.1
Other	10.6	5.3	10.5	5.6	8.1	17.5

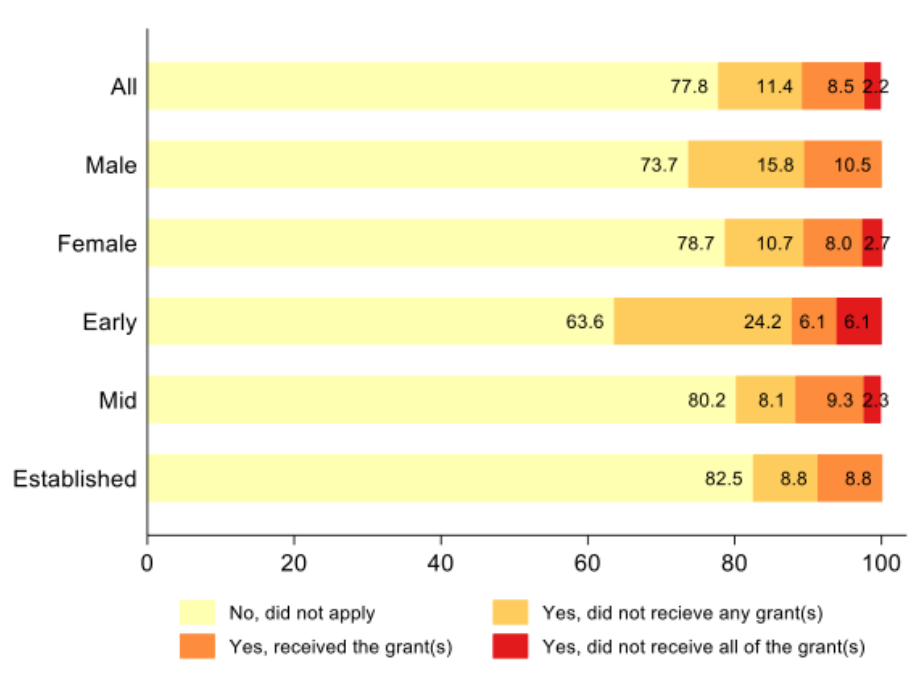
a. Multiple responses allowed

As shown in Figure 17, around 80% of arts workers did not apply for any COVID-19 specific arts grants in 2020-2021. This differed significantly for early career arts workers, who were more likely to apply for and receive COVID-19 arts grants. For those who received grants, 35% mainly used the funding to make new work, 20% to adapt their practice or project due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 10% used the funding mainly for living expenses.

<sup>12</sup> Wang-Ly, N. and Newell, B. (2022). 'Allowing early access to retirement savings: Lessons from Australia', *Economic Analysis and Policy*, 75, 716-733

<sup>13</sup> According to Wang-Ly and Newell (2022), the scheme was primarily accessed by those in the poorer financial circumstances, tended to be younger, earned less income and held fewer savings and more debt.

Figure 17: Applied for COVID-19 specific art grants between 2020-2021 (%)<sup>14</sup>



## Part 3: Discussion

### 1. Low incomes across the visual arts and craft sector

Arts workers are highly qualified yet earn significantly less than other professionals in the general population. The impacts on their current and future financial security and sense of professional worth rang throughout respondents' comments:

*“As an experienced worker, my salary should represent my level of expertise.”*

*“The money is atrocious. I've been on \$70k a year for the last ten+ years, despite changing my jobs multiple times and gaining extensive new skills and experience in this time. I'm single, live alone, don't have any financial support elsewhere—if I stay working in the arts, I am literally facing homelessness in my old age. It has to change.”*

*“Having enough money to get by—even as an arts worker who works 4 days a week, my income isn't enough to meet my day-to-day living costs.”*

*“There is no financial security as an artist or an arts worker. I think about giving up and walking away every few months.”*

<sup>14</sup> Some responded that they could not remember, and these are not shown here.

*“Mental health for arts workers is rock bottom, people are leaving the sector for an improved basic wage, and educational offerings continue to shrink.”*

### Policy Implication #1

A review of salaries in the arts and cultural sector needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency, the reasons for the disparity between the sector and wider professional workforce identified, and an agenda devised to remedy this. This needs to be a priority for the newly established Creative Workplaces as part of Creative Australia and state-based agencies.

#### 2. Endemic reliance on unpaid labour

A high percentage of arts workers (61.5%) reported participating in unpaid work in the arts sector, including volunteering on boards, in artist-run initiatives, on self-managed projects, in family arts-related business, and mentoring. This work generally contributes to the overall strength and progression of the sector, as noted in one comment by a respondent who reported: “providing guidance and consultation to other projects of friends who run ARI's etc.” as their regular form of unpaid work. Early career arts workers in particular reported spending an average of 11 hours per month on self-managed projects, potentially indicating that they are contributing unpaid labour to projects with the aim of developing their experience and skillset.

When asked whether they would take additional paid work hours each week, if they were available, 37% of respondents said that they would. This was largely due to needing additional income, but also to address the unpaid work they already undertook within their role.

“I work extra hours to make up for the hours I lost. I can't do all the work required in the time allowed by the institution.”

“It would recognise the unpaid hours I did.”

“I have enough work on my plate with the responsibilities of my role to more than make up another day of work. At the moment, I am trying to fit 5+ days of work into 4 paid days.”

“I usually work overtime and for free.”

This highlights the sector’s reliance on unpaid labour, both in the form of volunteer contributions to organisations as well as the expectation of those already employed to undertake more work within their role than they are paid for.



*“Underpayment and no payment across the sector (especially for public programs), and lack of Super.”*

*“Insecure work and LOW salaries despite the hours of work contributed.”*

*“Arts workers are paid below standard incomes despite being expected to do the work of at least three people.”*

Overall, this indicates that outcomes for visual and craft arts organisations are largely delivered by staff who are underpaid, overworked, insecurely employed, and feel pressure to contribute unpaid labour in the interests of the success of their employer. Artist-run initiatives and independent arts projects are also supported by arts workers giving their time and expertise for little or no pay. Continued reliance on these circumstances risks significant burnout of staff and associated loss of sector knowledge and capacity if these employees leave the arts industry in favour of secure, better paid work elsewhere.

### Policy Implication #2

Unpaid work is endemic in the arts and cultural sector. There must be greater, more transparent recognition of the amount of unpaid labour in the arts, and a commitment to moving away from this model. In part this continues due to inadequate award coverage of the sector. An examination of whether work currently performed in a voluntary capacity should be paid in accordance with employment legislation and agreements.

### 3. Insecure employment

Another key finding of the survey is a trend of under-employment for arts workers, with many indicating that they would work more hours if they were available. Job security also emerged as a significant concern, with high rates of fixed-term and casual employment. This was highest for early career arts workers but was a common experience across career stages.

*“I’ve been working in the industry for 10 years and I’ve never had more than a 22-month contract. Permanent positions are hard to find.”*

*“I nabbed a permanent part time local government arts job after years in ARIs and casual install. I’m so lucky, it’s a workers’ paradise. Everyone deserves this.”*

*“There is a lack of fixed-term contracts with room to grow or apply for promotion. I have been engaged by a university in casual work for seven years and there is no opportunity to apply for permanent work.”*

Of note is the heavy reliance of arts organisations on ongoing operational funding and how this impacts the availability—or lack of—secure employment for arts workers:

*“The independent visual art sector is reliant upon multi-year funding. This means every 3 - 4 years my job, and that of my colleagues, is on the line. This insecurity sees people leave the arts sector.”*

*“I have never experienced financial security as an arts worker. The main barriers are low wages or temporary work (contracts, casual) due to roles being based on grant funding outcomes.”*

Arts workers also reported undertaking a significant amount of work outside of the visual arts and craft sector, suggesting that many are working multiple jobs or are studying (potentially to further their careers) while working.

Male arts workers were more likely to be self-employed and were also more likely to report their career stage as mid-career or established (89.4%) compared to women (79.4%). Males also work more hours overall and tend to spend more time on arts businesses than females.

Survey findings indicate that the lack of ongoing work for arts workers contributes to the number of people who are self-employed. While respondents recognised the benefits of self-employment, such as flexibility and independence, others found it a necessary avenue to securing work of any kind.

Self-employment also carries with it many responsibilities that those in secure employment do not have to take on, such as working to gain contract or project-based jobs to maintain a liveable income and managing their own Superannuation and insurance. An over-reliance on self-employment could therefore be a contributing factor to the instability of the sector.

### Policy Implication #3

With a number of visual arts and craft organisations supported by operational funding from state and federal government agencies, further research should be undertaken into how current grant funding contributes to the prevalence of unpaid labour and insecure employment terms, and how these agencies might better support arts workers and uphold best practice employment standards across the sector. All methods of funding need to be explored to ensure that, so far as possible, project-based work is minimised, and ongoing positions are created.

#### 4. Gender segmentation and gender pay gap

There is a significant gender pay gap of 23.3% for female arts workers, which is much higher than Australia’s gender pay gap of 13.3%<sup>15</sup>. This is only partly accounted for by career stage, as male arts workers were only slightly more likely to report being at an established career stage, therefore earning a higher income (37%) than female arts workers (32%).

When asked to provide the main reason for wanting additional paid hours of employment, both male and female respondents said it was to increase their income and/or better cover the costs of living. Female respondents also noted the need to support their families, and that more work

---

<sup>15</sup> Reference: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/pay-and-gender/gender-pay-gap-data>

in the arts might enable them to develop their career and to continue working in the sector. Additional paid hours as a form of recognition of their unpaid work was noted by both males and females.

Only a few male respondents said they would not take additional paid hours of work due to already working full-time and wanting to retain time for their practice and other projects. Of the female respondents who said they would not take on more paid work if it was available, the primary reasons given were the need to maintain adequate studio time and managing caring commitments. Others noted they were already working full-time or undertaking study. Illness was also mentioned.

*“...the need to pay for studio and rent and childcare for research and development time, low salary as an arts worker.”*

The lack of a reliable and adequate income was also referenced as a barrier to financial and social insecurity by women:

*“Very hard to have job security, always short contracts, hard to get a bank loan with only short contracts. I have children so that makes it extra hard to plan with the job insecurity.”*

Although there are a significantly higher number of female arts workers in our sample, there are slightly fewer females reporting having dependents than their male peers (30% female versus 37% male). This may suggest that female arts workers with dependents face barriers returning to work after having children. When asked why they were self-employed, for example, one respondent noted they were “laid off due to being pregnant and in [my] job for less than 12 months.”

It seems that the issues facing many women wanting to return to work are similar for those in the arts than in the general population. Addressing these barriers, such as job security when taking time away from work to have children and access to childcare when returning to work, would contribute to the sustainability of female arts workers’ incomes and careers. Childcare responsibilities and being a single parent were also referenced by women when discussing the barriers to financial security:

*“I practiced as a professional when time from my day job and sole parent duties permitted.”*

#### Policy Implication #4

Any examination of salaries and working conditions needs to acknowledge the gendered nature of the workforce in the visual arts and craft sector. Gender segmentation is known to contribute to income disparity, with work predominantly performed by women being valued less than that carried out by men. Even in female dominated sectors of the workforce, senior and hence higher paid positions still tend to be held by men. Women in the visual arts and craft sector are doubly disadvantaged: working in a lower paid sector, often on short term or casual contracts, and without the comprehensive workplace protections and security of employment that exists in

more regulated or unionised areas, and where well-paid leadership roles (such as CEOs and Directors of state galleries), are often held by men.

### 5. Culturally and linguistically diverse arts workers

CALD arts workers were predominantly early career. This could be due to a greater number of opportunities for CALD arts workers entering the workforce at an early career stage. However, given that over 80% of respondents agreed that there were barriers to participation in the visual arts sector, it is also likely related to barriers to career progression. Visa types and residency status were noted as impediments to securing work as well as ineligibility for some grant funding.

In addition, cultural safety in workplaces can be a barrier to CALD artists participating in arts work. As one respondent said: "There are always cultural biases—and, of course, you still need a living wage to support you while you make your art. People of colour—especially women—tend to have lower paying jobs, and so need to spend more time on their paid work than their own craft."

*"Residency and visa status as a temporary Australian resident over 10 years blocks a lot of pathways to work as an artist and /or arts worker in Australia. The bureaucratic administrative structures, especially the differentiation between temporary and permanent resident/citizen on their rights, opportunities, and obligations."*

*"...cultural understanding (convincing migrant parents this is a good idea), general lack of safety within organisations as a POC [person of colour]"*

### Policy Implication #5

Arts workers on some types of visas or in certain stages of securing residency status have fewer opportunities to secure work or be eligible for some art grant programs, which can in turn impact their ability to progress in their career. Funding agencies and employers who require staff to be permanent residents should review these criteria to ensure that they do not operate as a form of direct or indirect discrimination based on cultural background. Arts organisations need to invest in cultural safety professional development for staff and boards to attract, retain and support the career progression of CALD staff.

### 6. Disability

10.7% of arts workers in the sample identified as having a disability compared to 9.3% of the working age population and 17.7% of the general population. Among our total survey population, 90% agreed that there are barriers to participation in the visual arts and craft sector. In our free text responses, several barriers were identified, and examples of overt discrimination were given.

*"It is not possible to appropriately have work adjustments while working on projects and festivals. I have also requested adjustments whilst applying for jobs and been denied them or had contracts withdrawn".*

*“My disability and subsequent lack of income (having to survive on a Disability Support pension, when 62% of it goes on rent). I ceased tutoring because I am immuno-suppressed. I might pick it up again soon despite the risk as I need the money.”*

#### Policy Implication #6

Employment in some areas of the visual arts and craft sector could be more accessible to people with disabilities. Visual arts and craft organisations and agencies should undertake an assessment of their workplace accessibility and recruitment processes and diversity requirements to support people with disability entering the arts and sustaining careers in the industry.

#### 7. Arts Education and Educators

As noted previously, arts workers are a highly educated workforce. In addition to this, over a third of arts workers in our survey reported working as arts educators. The field of arts education is therefore playing an important role both in supporting the career development of arts workers and in providing direct employment and incomes to arts workers.

#### Policy Implication #7

Secure and appropriate funding for visual art and craft programs, particularly in the tertiary sector, has direct and indirect impacts on the sustainability of arts workers’ incomes and employment, as well as on their career pathways. Greater investment in visual art and craft education has the flow-on benefit of increasing incomes and employment for artists and arts workers.

#### 8. Grant funding

Almost half of the sample of arts workers had not applied for grant funding. Nevertheless, arts workers in our survey discussed the important role of funding, both individually and for the sector. Responses to questions about barriers to financial security and areas where grants are most beneficial reveal that arts workers are very much aware of the need for this source of funding.

For arts workers engaged on independent projects, grants are especially valuable as they provide the financial support to realise activities that develop their careers. This is reinforced by the data; the majority of arts workers who had applied for grants favoured funding for specific projects or research and development time, particularly as early career arts workers. However, as their careers progress, arts workers again note that the need for funding shifts towards stabilising the sector they’re working in:

*“Grant funding has been incredibly useful with getting projects off the ground in my early career, but working full-time now for an arts organisation, I would rarely go for a grant for myself, more usually for the organisation.”*

Issues in how grant funds are expected or allowed to be spent were also raised, further emphasising the findings on unpaid work and underemployment:

*“Being able to request adequate funding for arts workers as part of a project budget would be incredibly beneficial. As it is, funders make it a condition that artists are paid—which is fair—but arts workers are not given the same consideration. Graphic designers, photographers, PR reps etc. are all considered valid expenses. The people responsible for conceptualising/delivering/producing the project are not. For me, this is an unrealistic view of how the sector functions and an unsustainable way of supporting it.”*

For those that did apply for grants, barriers to and challenges of applying for funding included administration/time of writing grants, funding priorities/criteria not matching projects or practice, and the amount of funding available. A track record of receiving grants also emerged as a significant barrier, which was particularly evident for early career arts workers.

Other challenges identified ranged from the language skills required to interpret and write grant applications, to perceived conflicts of interest with their place of work. As one arts worker noted:

*“I administer and assess grant programs so am not able to apply.”*

The majority of respondents thought funding was best suited to early and mid-career stages rather than at the established stage, which points to the conundrum of track record in applying for grants at the early career stage. Finally, female arts workers were less likely to apply for grants than male arts workers. This warrants further investigation to ensure that arts funding schemes are equitable.

#### Policy Implication #8

Grant funding could be further targeted towards early and mid-career arts workers. Consistent, sufficient operational funding for arts organisations is directly linked to opportunities for arts workers gaining secure work in their field. This then influences their career development, as secure work enables people to improve their skills and progress through different roles and levels. Similarly, grant funding that is directed towards projects, research, and project management fees supports arts workers to gain practical experience that enhances their employability.

Concerns relating to career progression on the part of CALD arts workers suggests that some grant applications should be made more streamlined and simpler to understand and write, especially for artists who experience language and writing challenges (such as some CALD artists and arts workers).

#### 9. Pandemic impacts

With overall falls in their average income, arts workers' incomes were more detrimentally impacted by COVID-19 than that of artists. Males saw the biggest fall with 14.5%, while early career arts workers saw a fall of almost 21% in their median arts worker income. Here again, the proportion of early career arts workers in casual employment could be a factor in this. Casual employees were only eligible for JobKeeper if they had been consistently employed by the same

business for more than 12 months and were not employed on a permanent basis elsewhere—whether part-time or full-time. Arts workers in casual roles were therefore the first casualties for organisations reducing staff during the peak of the pandemic.

Although these criteria also applied to artists, results from our survey show that, overall, they did not experience a decline in income from their artistic practice across the 2018/2019 and 2020/2021 financial years. This suggests that early career arts workers were worse off financially than artists during the pandemic. COVID-19 lockdowns also resulted in the cancellation or postponement of large numbers of exhibitions, festivals, public art project and art events, which had a flow-on impact for employment for arts workers. Another significant factor is the high numbers of those working as art educators—with most Universities ineligible for JobKeeper funding, arts educators were particularly vulnerable to loss of employment and income during the pandemic.

#### Policy Implication #9

Policies developed for emergency situations, such as a global pandemic, should take a broader view of employment that recognises the increased casualisation of many workplaces and number of people working multiple jobs to make a living, particularly in the arts. As a major employer of arts workers and artists—and the workforce in general—Universities must be included in supports provided by government in such circumstances.

## Reference List

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Australian Census of Population and Housing, 2021*. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Average Weekly Earnings, Australia. Estimates of weekly earnings classified by industry, sector, state and territory*, [Reference period May 2022]. Published 18 August 2022. [https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia/may-2022#:~:text=Media%20releases-,Key%20statistics,%2C%20and%20%241%2C523.60%20\(private\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia/may-2022#:~:text=Media%20releases-,Key%20statistics,%2C%20and%20%241%2C523.60%20(private))
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *How ANZSCO works*. [Article]. Published 21 June 2021. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Federal Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/how-anzsco-works>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Working arrangements: Working arrangements and forms of employment, such as casual work, fixed-term, independent contractors, shift work, job flexibility and job security*, [Reference period August 2022]. Published 14 December 2022. Australian Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/working-arrangements/latest-release>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). *People with disability in Australia. Labour Force Participation*, [Web Report]. Last updated 5 July 2022. AIHW, Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/employment/labour-force-participation>
- Wang-Ly, N. and Newell, B. (2022). 'Allowing early access to retirement savings: Lessons from Australia'. *Economic Analysis and Policy*, 75, 716-733. <https://www.moneymanagement.com.au/news/superannuation/average-super-early-access-recipient-has-30-years-make-it>.