

Industry snapshot: What do we know about the work of performing arts?

Introduction

This short article stems from a national project that responded to growing social and economic demands for higher education graduates who can negotiate rapidly transforming employment contexts. Recognising that the number of part-time, casual and/or multiple job-holding workers has never been higher and that traditional forms of employment are increasingly rare, this project focused on disciplines with ill-defined or difficult-to-enter graduate destinations. These included music and dance; biomedical sciences and biotechnology; professional and creative writing; and computer science. In contrast to the employer focus of the other projects, the team focused on students, graduates and academic leaders.

The research confirmed that to identify and develop the skills and attributes needed to navigate post-graduation pathways, higher education students need timely and informed support. Graduates assert that the lack (or under development) of these skills and attributes is one of the most critical disadvantages encountered by graduates transitioning into work.

What does the data tell us?

The 2013 Australian Graduate Survey collected data from 1,444 graduates from Performing Arts degrees. Data was collected between four and six months after graduation.

Population

Data was collected from graduates with the following characteristics:

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Male	595	41.2
Female	849	58.8
Median age	23	n/a
First language English	1,275	88.3
First language Other	141	9.8
Graduate from undergraduate degree	1262	87.4
Graduate from postgraduate degree	157	10.9

Overall outcomes

Overall, 57.5 per cent of graduates were working part-time, 28.1 per cent were self-employed and 19.1 per cent were working full-time. In terms of studying, 33.5 per cent were studying full-time and 5.5 per cent were studying part-time.

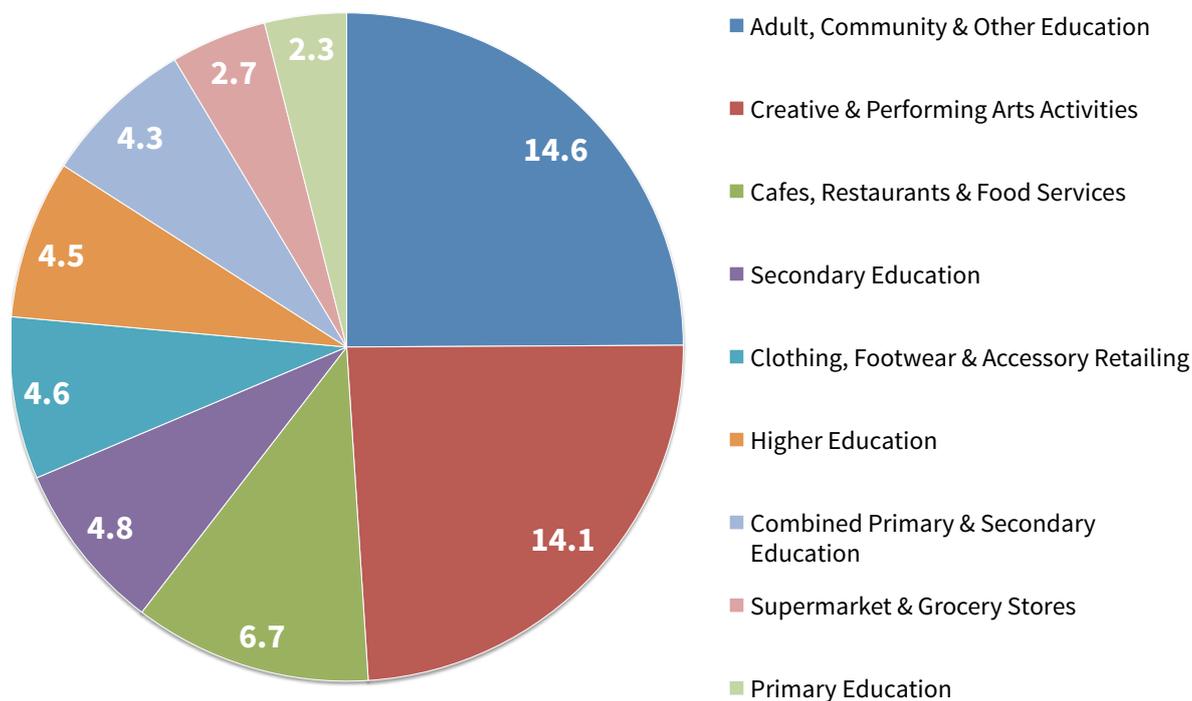
Status	Number	Percentage
Full-time work	276	19.1
Part-time work	817	57.5
Self-employed	298	28.1
Studying full-time	471	33.5
Studying part-time	77	5.5

What is the broader employment context?

The performing arts are located within the creative industries sector, which is commonly defined as including the commercial and non-commercial industries of architecture and design; film, television, video, radio and publishing; fine arts; music and the performing arts; software and computer gaming; advertising; and crafts (UNCTAD, 2008).

The latest Australian Census data (2011) suggests that creative industries employment represents 5.3 per cent of Australia's national workforce, or 531,000 people, and that the creative and cultural industries contribute over \$86 billion to Australian GDP.

These industries are among Australia's strongest performers (CCI Scorecard, 2013, n. p), with 40 per cent faster growth than that seen than in the general economy. This growth is attributed largely to the digital revolution and growth in digital and design services. Performing arts graduates have opportunities across and beyond this diverse and exciting sector.



Further study

Of the 550 graduates who were undertaking further study, 48.1 per cent were studying in the field of performing arts and 26.9 per cent were in the field of education.

Understanding creative careers

Graduate employment data suggest that graduates of arts and creative industries programs consistently have the poorest graduate outcomes of the 40 broad disciplines measured in Australia's annual graduate destination statistics collection (Graduate Careers Australia, 2012).

According to 2013 Graduate Destination Survey figures, which amassed data from 83,000 graduates, visual and performing arts graduates engage in a range of employed and self-employed roles, including both part-time and full-time work.

When only full-time employment is considered, the poor graduate outcomes are evident. However, as shown in Figure 1, when other forms of work are included the employment outcomes of all students emerge as relatively similar (Bennett et al., 2015). The reason for this disparity is that despite the size and performance of the creative industries, creative workers' careers are too complex to be recorded in traditional measures such as the Census or the Graduate Destination Survey. The limitations of existing data are illustrated by empirical research: for example, economist David Throsby (2008) concluded that the actual number of creative workers is over twice the official recorded number.

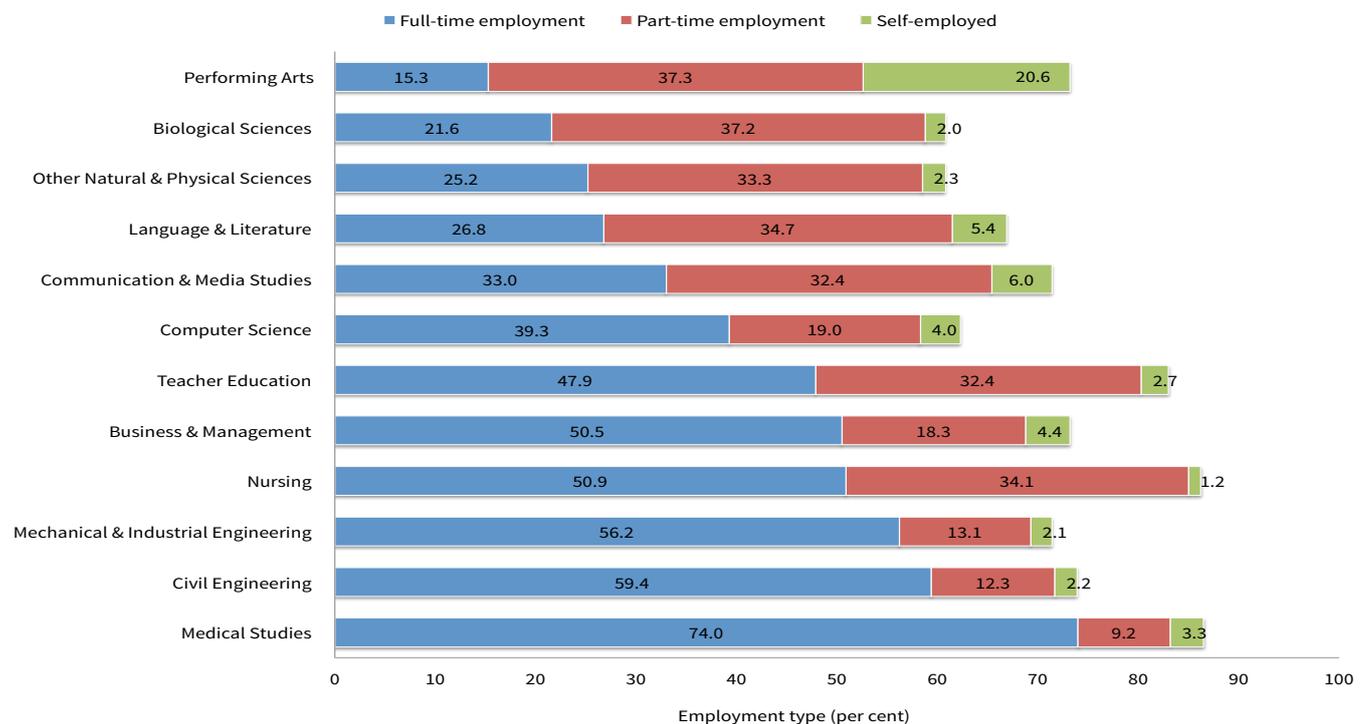


Figure 1: Employment outcomes, Graduate Destination Survey 2013 (per cent)

To provide more specificity, the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation established a creative trident of occupations (Higgs et al., 2008). The trident describes workers as specialist creatives employed in core creative occupations within creative industries (for example, ballet dancers); embedded workers employed in core creative occupations within other industries (for example, musicians working in therapeutic settings); or support workers employed in other occupations within the creative industries (for example, workers undertaking retail or business support roles). Creative workers undertaking work predominantly outside the trident are defined as 'non-creative workers'.

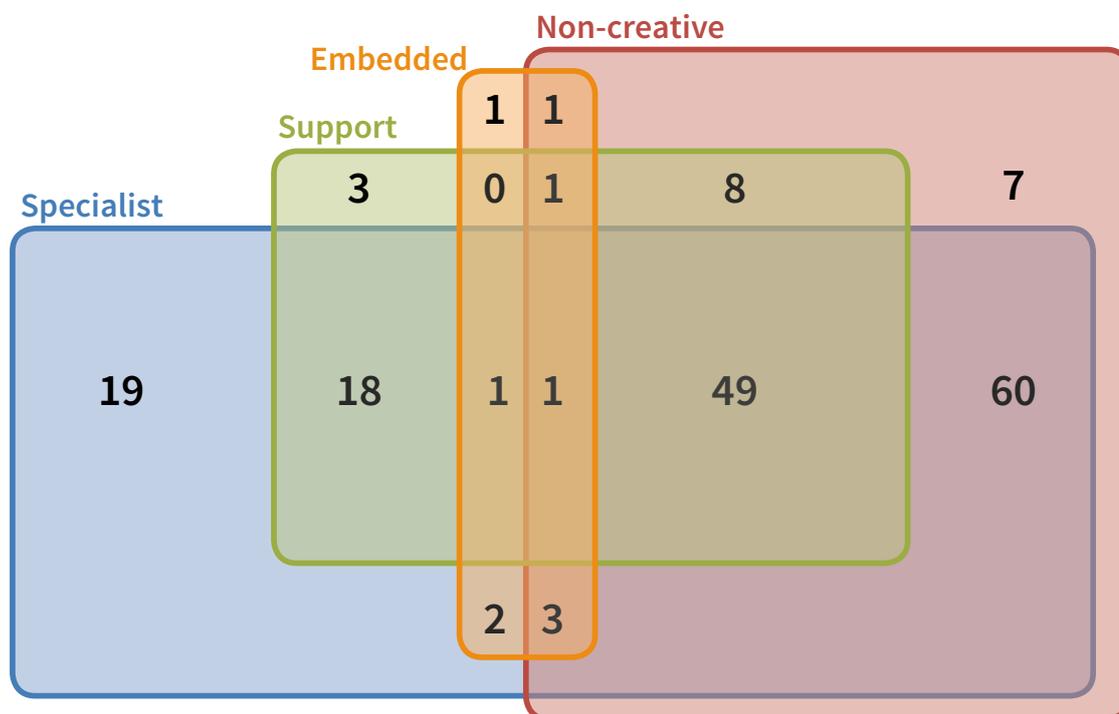


Figure 2: The intersection of work across the creative trident (Bennett et al., p. 164)

The lack of nuanced data has led to empirical research including analyses of 'good and bad' work (Fitzgerald, Rainnie & Bennett, 2011); old and new sectors including digital economies (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011); the characteristics of creative work (Smith & McKinley, 2009); flexibility and autonomy (Banks, 2010); and creativity itself (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Studies such as these are starting to reveal the realities of work in the creative industries sector, including for graduates. The lack of nuanced data has led to empirical research including analyses of 'good and bad' work (Fitzgerald, Rainnie & Bennett, 2011); old and new sectors including digital economies (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011); the characteristics of creative work (Smith & McKinley, 2009); flexibility and autonomy (Banks, 2010); and creativity itself (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Studies such as these are starting to reveal the realities of work in the creative industries sector, including for graduates.

Where do graduates go? Focusing in the performing arts

According to the Australian Government, there were almost 21,000 creative arts graduates in 2013 and 20 per cent of these graduates were employed on a full-time basis (Graduate Destination Survey, 2013). In other sectors we might imagine this 20 per cent to be in full-time jobs with a single company; however, this sector is a little different!

Whilst some music and dance graduates hold full-time positions in the major arts companies, these positions represent a small minority of performing artists. In Australia there are less than 600 full-time company positions for instrumentalists, 50 for vocalists and just under 200 for dancers (Bennett, 2008; 2009); artists who come from other countries hold approximately one-third of these positions. Researchers in the US, Europe and the UK report similar situations (see Beeching, 2010; Perkins, 2012).

Many arts graduates aspire to make a living through the creation or expression of their creative work. Because full-time arts company employment is rare, employment for many graduates comes in the form of creative work undertaken outside of the arts and creative sectors. Cunningham and Higgs (2010) determined that in 2006, 65.5 per cent of dancers or choreographers and 40.5 per cent of musicians, singers, or composers are employed principally outside the creative industries.

Bennett et al's study (2014) has found no significant differences between the average number of hours in each role; between sexes; or between employed/self-employed workers, contractual or casual work. This suggests that complex and changeable patterns of work exist throughout the career life cycle and across creative disciplines and genres.

Creative workers manage their own careers, work typically in small firms and on an ad-hoc basis, gain employment through networks, and stay employable by learning new skills and ensuring that they were visible to the market. These are the most likely work patterns for graduates.

Performing artists are up to five times more likely to be self-employed than other workers, and in the case of professional composers self-employment stands at 93 per cent (Throsby & Zednik, 2010). This high rate of self-employment is similar in other countries and also in city-based studies (cf Center for an Urban Future, 2008). Moreover, one in five creative workers are understood to hold a "day job" entirely unrelated to the creative industries (Throsby & Zednik, 2010).

Approximately 85 per cent of dance artists are registered as a business and the Australian dance sector consists "almost entirely of dance artists for whom independent project-based work is the norm and the inclusion of non-performance roles almost inevitable" (Bennett, 2009, p. 28).

Similarly, Burns (2007, p. 12) has found that UK dance artists typically include "arts related work such as teaching alongside their performance work and they often work in non-arts work in order to earn an adequate living". Vincs (2007, n. p) has labelled this work "hybridity", and the term is a useful tool when discussing work and career with students.

Things to think about

Although performing arts work is complicated, it is also exciting for graduates who are informed and work ready. Here are some things to think about:

1. Employability for arts graduates most often demands the skills required to create and manage a small business and the resilience to negotiate work that is intermittent, complex, and challenging.
2. Arts graduates are likely to hold multiple concurrent roles within a changing portfolio of work. They are likely to undertake some or all of their work within another economic sector.
3. Arts graduates are likely to work as sole traders or in small firms, working in casual and project-based employment with little security. They are likely to supplement their creative work with more secure work that is unrelated to the arts or that involves related roles such as teaching. Teaching needs to be positioned as a valuable and “successful” outcome.
4. Arts graduates are likely to obtain work through networks, often because tight budgets and timeframes lead employers and clients to hire those they know and trust.
5. Throughout their career lifecycle, arts graduates will need to remain employable by learning new skills, ensuring they are visible to the market, and knowing the market and those within it.
6. Arts graduates commonly report that they do not have these skills on graduation.

Asked what changes they might make to their formal education and training, arts alumni recommend the inclusion of small business skills, entrepreneurship skills, self-management skills and industry experience.

These aspects align with the findings of the OLT Commissioned project, and tools and resources within the toolkit are designed to help. Specifically, the toolkit resources help educators to address five key themes:

- Develop skills and knowledge;
- Develop self;
- Develop career awareness;
- Interact with others; and
- Navigate the world of work.

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