

*Planning for the Future*

Statistical Profile:  
Theatre

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# Key points and contents

## Part one: Industry

### SUPPLY

#### *Employment*

- There were an estimated 4,700 people employed as actors in 1996
- Employment in drama occupations grew slower than total employment from 1986 to 1991, but faster than total employment from 1991 to 1996
- The median income of full-time actors was lower than other occupations in 1996

#### *Organisations*

- Selected industry indicators 1997 (see text for details)
- Between 1980 and 1991, the number of theatre organisations grew faster than the number of cultural organisations
- Sponsorship to theatre declined as a proportion of total arts sponsorship between 1993 and 1996

### DEMAND

#### *Audiences*

- Attendance rates at theatre declined from 1991 to 1995 and were stable from 1995 to 1999
- Audience profiles (see text for detail)
- Motivators and barriers to attendance (see text for detail)

## Part two: Sector

- Enrolments in university dramatic arts courses increased by less than all tertiary enrolments from 1989 to 1993
- From 1990 to 1996, the number of students enrolled in dramatic arts courses at vocational institutions grew while all arts enrolments declined

## Part one: Industry

### SUPPLY

#### Employment

The two main sources of data on employment in the arts are the ABS' population census and Throsby and Mills (1989) and Throsby and Thompson (1994). However, neither source provides a complete picture of employment in theatre in Australia. Playwrights are treated as authors in both sources and are not separately identifiable. Furthermore, the Throsby surveys do cover directors, producers and people employed in theatre in non-artist occupations such as wardrobe and set designers, carpenters, sound and lighting technicians and front of house staff. Although these occupations are recorded in the ABS' census, the ABS' classifications do not allow an estimate to be made of how many of the people in these occupations are employed in live theatre<sup>1</sup>. For example, the occupation 'director' covers film, TV, radio and stage directors. Some disaggregation of employment in this occupation is possible, but not to the detail required to separate theatre directors from directors in the performing arts in general (ie it is possible to determine how many directors are employed in 'music and theatre production' – 73 people in 1991 (see appendix AP in the performing arts chapter) - but not how many of these music and theatre directors are in live theatre alone. The problem is exacerbated by the ability for directors, producers, playwrights and people in other theatrical/drama occupations to work in other industries, such as film, TV, radio and music.

As a result of these difficulties, data on employment set out in this chapter is for two occupations only: actors and drama teachers.

*There were an estimated 4,700 people employed as actors in 1996*  
The 1996 Census records 1,505 people employed as actors. A more accurate estimate of around 4,700 employed actors can be made by using data from Throsby and Thompson (1994). The estimation procedure is outlined in Appendix AT.

**Figure T.1: Estimate of employment in selected drama occupations, 1996**

	Number employed	
	Actual	Estimate*
Actor	1,505	4,735
Drama teacher (private)	400	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,905</b>	<b>5,135</b>

\*Estimation method described in Appendix AT

Sources: ABS *Employment in selected culture/leisure occupations*, Throsby and Thompson (1994)

<sup>1</sup> A list of the occupations that are identifiable from census classifications is set out in Appendix AP in the performing arts chapter.

*Employment in drama occupations grew slower than total employment from 1986-91, but faster than total employment from 1991-96*

As with other cultural professions, drama professions grew faster than total employment from 1991 to 1996 (figure T.2). Data from Guldberg (2000) indicates that employment in acting professions (minus private drama teaching) grew slower than total employment over the previous census period 1986 to 1991 (6 percent compared to 9 percent). The two time periods are incomparable due to differences in definition.

**Figure T.2: Employment in selected drama occupations 1991 to 1996**

Occupation	Numbers		Percent change
	1991	1996	1991-1996
Actors	1,217	1,505	23.7
Drama teachers (private)	300	400	33.3
Cultural professions	93,000	115,700	24.4
Total employment			5.6

Source: Guldberg (2000)/ABS

*The median income of full-time actors was lower than the median income for total employment in 1996; higher for part-time actors*

Figure T.3 indicates that in 1996 the median income of full-time actors was around \$2,000 per annum less than for total employment and around \$5,000 less than for all cultural occupations. Full-time private drama teachers had slightly higher than average median incomes. Trend income data for drama occupations is not available.

**Figure T.3: Incomes of selected drama occupations, 1996**

Occupation	Annual median income, \$ <sup>1</sup>	
	Full-time	Part-time
Actor	27,385	17,938 +
Drama teacher (private)	30,148 +	12,674
Total cultural occupations	32,331 +	15,406 +
Total employed	29,424	14,777

<sup>1</sup>Full-time = 35 hours or more per week; + signifies if income is above average for total employment.

Source: ABS unpublished census 1996

Recent years have seen lively debate over the representation of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds in the theatrical, film and television workforce. The Australia Council has commissioned research to clarify and add to the debate. The research results have not yet been made public, but the data suggest that Australians born in non-English-speaking countries (NESBs) are under-represented in theatre employment; in some cases, the ratio of NESBs in theatre employment is less than half that in total employment (Bertone et al, pending).

## Organisations

### *Selected industry indicators 1997*

Figure T.4 presents selected indicators for drama organisations from the ABS' survey of the music and theatre production industry<sup>2</sup>. In 1997, drama organisations were 11 percent of organisations and accounted for 14 percent of the employment, 10 percent of total industry income, 16 percent of performances and 14 percent of paid attendances. Drama organisations were close to average in size for the total industry both in numbers employed and in income and had close to average attendance per performance.

**Figure T.4: Selected industry indicators, drama 1997**

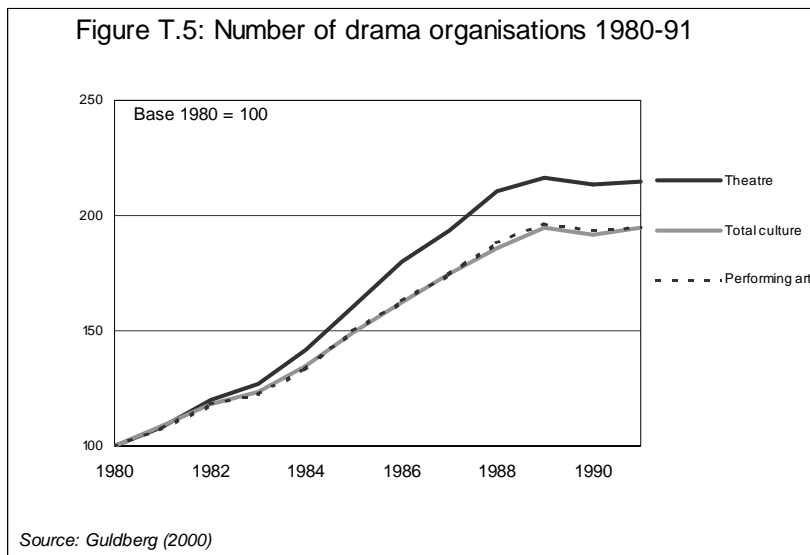
	Drama organisations	1997 Music and theatre production	Drama as percent of total
Businesses (no.)	101	881	11
Employment (no.)	859	6,082	14
<i>Percent full-time</i>	58	50	
FTEs	679	4,574	15
FTEs per business	7	5	
Income (\$m)	58.3	594.3	10
Income per business (\$m)	0.6	0.7	
Income per FTE (\$)	85,925	129,944	
Paid performances	10,723	68,994	16
Paid attendances ('000)	1,824	12,794	14
Attendance/performance	170	185	
Government funding (\$m)	n/a	179.3	n/a
Government funding/total industry	n/a	30	

Source: ABS *Performing arts industries 1996-97*

*Between 1980 and 1991 the number of theatre organisations grew faster than the number of cultural and performing arts organisations*

Figure T.5 indicates that the number of theatre organisations grew at a faster rate than all cultural and performing arts organisations from 1980 to 1991 (a 115 percent increase compared to 95 percent for all cultural organisations). The number of organisations in 1991 was more than double that in 1980. In 1986 there was one theatre for every 424,000 Australians; in 1991 there was one theatre for every 457,000 Australians.

<sup>2</sup> Drama organisations are defined as 'professional and amateur theatre companies which present live drama theatre to the general public'.



*Business sponsorship to theatre declined as a proportion of total business arts sponsorship between 1993 and 1996*

Figure T.6 indicates that the proportion of business sponsorship going to theatre declined from 15 to 11 percent between 1993 and 1996.

**Figure T.6: Business sponsorship of theatre 1993 and 1996**

	\$m current	
	1993	1996
Theatre	8.3	6.9
All arts*	57.2	64.9
<i>Theatre as percent of all arts</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>11</i>

\* Excludes purchases of artworks by businesses

Source: Australia Council (1996)

## Products

In 1997 the drama organisations in the ABS' music and theatre production industry survey presented 10,723 paid performances. Government subsidised organisations presented on average 132 performances per organisation, other organisations 71 performances per organisation.

Although there is no definitive survey of theatre ticket prices in Australia, the organisations covered by the major performing arts inquiry might be seen to be price leaders, or to at least reflect broader pricing trends in the industry. Data from the inquiry indicates that the price of theatre tickets increased relative to other goods and services in the middle of the '90s. The average ticket price of the theatre organisations included in the inquiry rose in real terms from \$25 to \$27, or 1.3 percent per annum between 1992 and 1997. This is less than the rise in average ticket prices for music

(3.2 percent) and opera (1.9 percent), but more than for dance (0.7 percent).

## DEMAND

### Audiences

*Attendance rates at theatre declined from 1991 to 1995 and were stable from 1995 to 1999*

Nearly 2.5 million people attended a theatrical production at least once during 1999 (16.5 percent of Australians aged 15 years and over). Although this is 127,000 more than in 1995, the attendance rate remained stable over the period. Attendance rates for all cultural venues increased by 2 percentage points from 1995 to 1999, and 5 percentage points for cinema attendance. Figure T.7 summarises attendance data.

Although changes to survey methodology make comparison of attendances with previous years impossible, the ABS has reconciled the surveys for the purposes of discerning trends in attendance rates. The data indicates that the theatre attendance rate declined by nearly two percentage points over the previous survey period 1991 to 1995, while attendance rates for all cultural venues declined by just under one percentage point.

**Figure T.7: Theatre attendances 1995 to 1999**

	1995		1999		change in attendance rate 1995-99*
	number (‘000)	attendance rate	number (‘000)	attendance rate	
Theatre	2,336.3	16.6	2,464.9	16.5	0
All culture	11,670.0	82.9	12,615.8	84.6	2

\* Point change, not percentage change

Source: ABS Attendance at selected cultural venues

Data from the Australia Council’s *Selling the Performing Arts* indicates that theatrical attendance is highest at ‘humorous theatre’ and general ‘drama’, with 28 percent and 25 percent (respectively) of respondents having attended these at least once in the past 2 years. Mime/circus and experimental theatre were 16 percent and 5 percent respectively. Although smaller in number, experimental theatre-goers were more frequent attenders than humorous and drama theatre-goers.

## Audience profiles

*Frequency of attendance:* Australia Council (1999) indicates that theatre attenders tend to be evenly distributed across light to heavy frequency attenders.

*Age:* Both Australia Council (1999) and ABS indicate that theatre audiences tend to be spread more evenly across all ages than classical music and dance. The ABS indicates that the age profile of theatre attendees was older in 1999 compared to 1995.

*Qualification:* theatrical attendance is distributed more evenly across all qualifications than classical music and dance. Attendance rates for people with a basic vocational qualification were 16 percent for theatre, 8.1 percent for dance and 6.3 percent for classical music. Theatre was more popular among post-graduate qualified people than popular music (41 percent theatre attendance rate for people with a higher degree compared to 33 percent for popular music).

Audience profiles from Australia Council (1999) for various types of theatre are attached. The data indicates that theatre audiences tend to be more 'experiential' on average than all performing arts audiences. This was particularly notable in people attending drama and experimental theatre. 'Conservative' people and 'uninvolved' people (who are uncommitted to the arts and who perceive little value in the performing arts over cinema) were less likely to attend experimental theatre. Older people were less likely to be attenders at mime/circus and experimental theatre.

### *Motivators and barriers to attendance*

Motivators for attendance vary across types of theatrical performance (figure T.8). Price is important: expense is a barrier to classical/modern drama attendance, but cheapness a motivator for other theatrical forms. Familiarity is an important factor in attendance at classical/modern drama (a further motivator for this theatrical genre was previous study of drama or literature).

**Figure T.8: Selected motivators and barriers to attendance by theatre type, 1999**

Genre	Motivators	Barriers
Modern comedy/cabaret/comedians	social, light, reasonably cheap/accessible, fun venues, break from heavier forms of entertainment	too crude, venues rough, previous disappointments, fear of lack of understanding of humour
Classical/modern drama	intellectual, upper class, involving, familiarity with play/playwright	too formal, too intellectual, have to concentrate, have to plan too far ahead, expensive, lack of familiarity
Experimental/other theatre	new ideas/new thinking, cheaper, casual	audience participation intimidating, beyond comprehension, amateurish

Source: Australia Council (1999)

## Part two: Sector

*Enrolments in university dramatic arts courses grew by less than all tertiary enrolments from 1989 to 1993*

Figure T.9 shows that enrolments in dramatic arts courses at universities increased at around the same rate as total university enrolments, but less than the rate of all arts enrolments. The result was that enrolments in dramatic arts courses dropped from 6 percent to 5 percent of all arts enrolments. This data excludes NIDA.

**Figure T.9: University enrolments in drama courses (EFTSU) 1989 to 1993\***

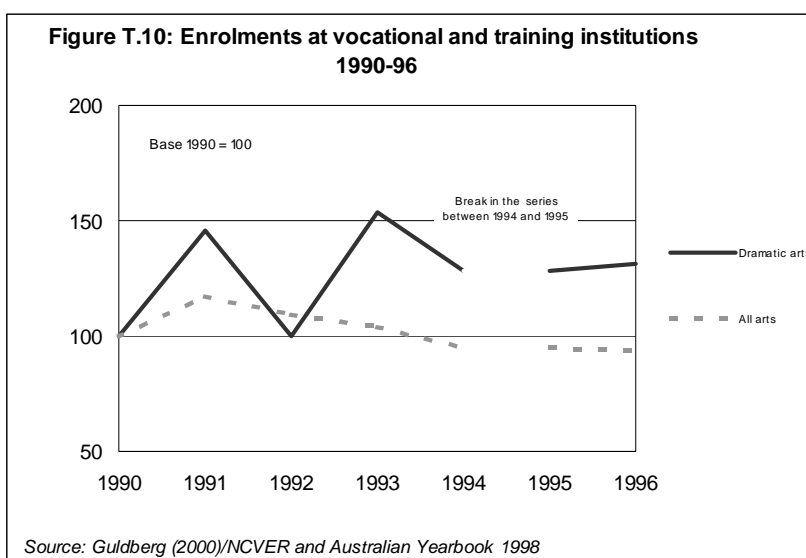
Course	1989	1993	Increase (no.)	Percent change 1989-93
Dramatic arts	696	863	167	24
Total arts	11,967	16,411	4,444	37
Total university	350,129	449,425	99,296	28

\* EFTSU = Equivalent full-time student units

Source: Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee (1995)

*From 1990 to 1996, the number of students enrolled in dramatic arts courses at vocational institutions grew while all arts enrolments declined*

Figure T.10 sets out indexes for enrolments in vocational education institutions. Enrolments in dramatic arts courses appear to have grown faster than all arts enrolments, although the reliability of the data is questionable, particularly prior to 1995 and should be interpreted with caution.



## Part three: Funding

Theatre funding data is not able to be separately identified in the ABS' cultural funding series nor from Guldberg (2000). Some trend data on Australia Council funding is supplied in figure T.11, which indicates that in the decade to 1998-99, Australia Council funding to theatre through the theatre fund and to the major theatre organisations declined from 32 percent to 18 percent of total Council funding.

**Figure T.11: Australia Council funding to theatre 1988-89 to 1998-99**

	\$m current prices		
	1988-89	1994-95	1998-99
Total Theatre	9,747,000	10,813,000	10,898,327
Total arts funding	30,636,000	53,107,000	60,859,020
<i>Theatre as percent of total</i>	32	20	18

NB: Excludes theatre funding by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, New Media Arts and Community Cultural Development Funds. Classification of funding for international projects also changed between periods.

Source: Australia Council Annual Reports

## Appendix AT

Figure AT.1 summarises the estimation procedure. Figures in bold are actuals. An estimate of 1993 census-measured employment in acting occupations is obtained by simple linear extrapolation. The higher level of ‘capture’ in Throsby and Thompson is then estimated by ratio (Throsby and Thompson captures 3 actors to every one captured in the census). This ratio is then applied to 1996 census data.

**Figure AT.1: Estimating total employment in acting from two sources**

	1991	1993	1996	<i>Ann. Av. change 1991-96</i>
Throsby & Thompson		<b>4,200</b>		
(a) Census 1996*	<b>1,217</b>	1,335	<b>1,505</b>	5
(b) Ratio Throsby/census		3.15		
Estimated total (a x b)			4,735	

Figures in bold are actuals

\*Estimate for 1993 obtained by applying annual average change to actual data