

# CHAPTER 5

## Education and training

Artists undertake a wide range of training and education to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to practise professionally. Their training pathways are often complex.

Some artists follow a relatively straight path by training at one or more tertiary institutions and on graduation commence their professional careers. Later, they may supplement their skills and knowledge with short courses and other types of training. On the other hand, some artists are self taught, beginning their careers by plunging straight in or else by learning skills on the job, perhaps later deciding to undertake training to consolidate or extend their competencies or experience.

Some artists undertake training in one area of the arts and later move into a different area of professional artistic practice for which they may either undertake further training or teach themselves. It is clear that many artists have training in more than one area of practice. This is especially the case in the performing arts where, for example, there are many actors who have studied music, dancers who have studied drama, or instrumental musicians who have studied composition.

This chapter looks at the types of training that artists undergo as part of the process of building an artistic career.

### Types of training

In this survey, artists were asked to nominate all of the types of training undertaken to become an artist, including:

- formal coursework at a tertiary level in a variety of institutions
- private tuition and mentorship
- other types of training such as non-award study, workshops and short courses, exchange programs or apprenticeships
- learning on the job
- self training.

Detail of the types of training undertaken by artists is given in Appendix I Table 5.1, and these results are summarised in Table 12. About three-quarters of all artists have had formal training of some sort and just over 40 per cent have undertaken private training. Among visual artists and craft practitioners there is a strong emphasis on formal training in universities or in TAFE schools or independent art/craft teaching institutions.

Many writers have also undertaken post-school education and training, though in many cases, writers' formal education is not specific training in writing. Not surprisingly, performing artists' training is concentrated in the various academies particular to their artform, with a strong emphasis, in addition, on private tuition.

Significant numbers of all types of artists have at least some component of self-tuition in their background, while most also acknowledge that they learn on the job. The survey showed that the process of learning by doing is especially important for actors and for community cultural development workers. For actors it may take years to achieve subtle performance skills, working live and in front of cameras. For

community cultural development workers the range of liaison, negotiation and artistic skills necessary is so wide that many of them can only be acquired through on the job experience. Note also the importance of workshops and short courses as a component of the training undertaken by all types of practising professional artists.

**Table 12 Types of training undertaken to become an artist**

	Artists(a) who have ever undertaken:				
	Formal training %	Private training %	Self taught %	Learning on the job %	Other training %
Writers	63	18	59	48	38
Visual artists	91	23	41	28	35
Craft practitioners	76	28	51	31	58
Actors	73	40	41	61	51
Dancers	94	50	19	47	45
Musicians	68	73	44	54	23
Composers	78	63	66	47	25
Community cultural development workers	89	39	55	73	61
<b>All artists</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>38</b>

(a) Proportions are of artists who have undertaken one or more types of training in that training category. Rows do not sum to 100 per cent because artists may have undertaken training in more than one category.

The figures in Table 12 demonstrate the wide range of training that artists have undergone but they do not show the significance of specific training avenues in leading towards an artistic career. In order to understand this, respondents were asked to nominate the single component of their training they regarded as the most important in preparing them for their career as an artist. Table 13 summarises these results, with detailed data presented in Appendix I Table 5.2.

**Table 13 Most important training to become an artist**

	Proportion of artists nominating as most important:					Total %
	Formal training %	Private training %	Self taught %	Learning on the job %	Other training %	
Writers	36	4	27	25	10	100
Visual artists	67	6	15	9	3	100
Craft practitioners	51	6	20	6	15	100
Actors	42	10	6	37	4	100
Dancers	67	10	3	20	*	100
Musicians	37	31	13	21	1	100
Composers	42	16	19	19	3	100
Community cultural development workers	50	–	8	31	11	100
<b>All artists</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>

\* indicates less than 1%. - indicates nil response in this sample.

It is apparent from these tables that formal training by coursework at a tertiary or specialist institution is by far the most important means of training for practising professional artists in Australia today. Private training is also significant as an important mode of training for performing artists, especially for musicians. Overall, almost two-thirds of all artists regard formal or private training, or some other organised training mode, as the most important in preparing them for their artistic career. The remaining one-third regard self-teaching or learning on the job as the most important form of training.

When interpreting these results, consider that perceptions of the most important avenue of training are likely to change with age. As artists grow older and the years of their formal training recede into the past, they may come to see experience or learning on the job as more important in their development.

Furthermore, there are more training opportunities available in the arts today than there were in previous years, suggesting that younger artists are more likely to have undertaken formal training than their older counterparts. Further analysis of these results does indeed indicate a higher proportion of older artists nominating 'self taught' or 'learning on the job' as their most important training avenue.

### Time spent in training

As in other professions, artists spend long periods in training to gain entry to their career or to enhance their skills once professional practice has commenced. Respondents in the survey were asked to indicate the number of equivalent full-time years they spent in obtaining their basic or higher qualifications to become an artist. Table 14 shows results for all types of training across all respondents, and for formal and private training for those artists for whom these modes were most important.

**Table 14 Time spent training to become an artist**

	All types of training (for all artists)		Formal and private training (for artists for whom formal or private was most important)	
	Mean (years)	Median (years)	Mean (years)	Median (years)
Writers	2.8	2.0	4.0	3.8
Visual artists	4.8	4.5	5.5	5.0
Craft practitioners	4.3	4.0	5.2	5.0
Actors	3.0	3.0	4.4	4.0
Dancers	5.8	5.0	6.4	5.0
Musicians	5.1	5.0	6.4	6.0
Composers	5.6	5.5	6.8	7.0
Community cultural development workers	4.6	4.2	4.4	4.0
<b>All artists</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>5.0</b>

Note: years are expressed in decimal form, for example three years and six months is 3.5 years.

The table indicates that on average artists spend a little over 4 years in training. Dancers spend the most time (almost 6 years) and writers the least (less than 3 years). Among those artists undertaking formal or private training, and for whom these modes were most significant in their training experience, the mean period of time spent gaining qualifications was more than 5 years. Dancers, musicians and composers have on average spent more than 6 years in formal or private training.

### Training: an ongoing process

For many artists, training is not a matter that ends with the acquisition of a formal qualification. Most artists acknowledge that they improve their skills throughout their careers, through experience and learning on the job. Some seek new skills in another artform to extend their creative range. Overall, lifelong learning is likely to be a stronger reality in the arts than in many other professions.

The survey results indicate the extent to which formal, private or other organised training continue to be undertaken by artists during their professional careers. A total of 31 per cent of all artists in our survey are still engaged in formal, private and/or other training, as shown in Table 15.

**Table 15 Artists still engaged in training**

	Proportion of artists(a) pursuing study through:			
	Formal training %	Private training %	Other training(b) %	Formal, private and/or other training(c) %
Writers	13	5	11	27
Visual artists	16	5	9	29
Craft practitioners	16	2	23	35
Actors	9	11	22	36
Dancers	19	13	22	50
Musicians	4	21	7	28
Composers	16	9	3	22
Community cultural development workers	13	16	19	39
<b>All artists</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>

(a) Proportions are for all artists, not just those pursuing further study.  
(b) Not including learning on the job or self taught.  
(c) A few artists are still engaged in more than one type of training, hence this column is less than the sum of the three component elements in each case.

Continuing training is especially important for dancers, community cultural development workers, actors and craft practitioners. Many of these artists are continuing studies in tertiary institutions, others (especially musicians) are engaged in ongoing private tuition, and significant numbers are extending their training through workshops, short courses and summer schools. Details are given in Appendix I Table 5.3.

Table 16 shows the proportions of artists still engaged in training who are in older age groups, attesting to the fact that training in an artist's career is ongoing. More than two-thirds of artists still engaged in training are over 35 years of age: 55 per cent are 35-54 years, and 13 per cent are over 55 years of age. The only exceptions are dancers, whose active careers tend to end around the age of 40. Further details of the age groups of artists still engaged in training are shown in Appendix I Table 5.4.

**Table 16 Age of artists still engaged in training**

	Proportion of artists(a) still engaged in training who are:	
	35-54 years of age %	over 55 years of age %
Writers	67	14
Visual artists	55	24
Craft practitioners	69	20
Actors	47	9
Dancers	24	—
Musicians	50	7
Composers	86	14
Community cultural development workers	59	8
<b>All artists</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>13</b>

(a) Proportions are of artists still engaged in formal, private and/or other training (such as workshops, master classes and non-award study), not including learning on the job or self taught. — indicates nil response in this sample.