

CHAPTER 6

Career development

Typically, an artist's career can be divided into stages. The earliest stage is often one of uncertainty, as the artist takes the first steps on the road to a professional career—the writer's first attempts at a short story or a play, an actor's first walk-on part. There follows a period in which the artist consolidates these early efforts and works hard to achieve a level of professional acceptance—this phase can be described as 'becoming established'.

The central stage of a fulfilled professional artistic career is one of established practice. This does not necessarily entail full-time or continuous work but certainly connotes a degree of commitment and a level of achievement to warrant the description of the artist as an established practising professional. For some artists this stage gives way to one where the commitment remains but the work is less intensive than at the height of the artist's career. Some elderly actors, for example, may be offered or may choose to play fewer parts. As they grow older, some visual artists may produce fewer works and not exhibit as often.

Our survey provides a snapshot of artists at different degrees of establishment in their professional careers. As Table 17 shows, about one-third of artists are starting out or becoming established. Of the remaining two-thirds who are established professional artists, one in three is working less intensively than before. This pattern varies across artistic occupations, as shown in more detail in Appendix I Table 6.1. In this chapter we consider some milestones in artistic careers, and how various factors advance or hold back career development.

Table 17 Artists' degree of establishment

	Proportion of all artists %
Beginning/starting out	7
Becoming established	28
Established	43
Established, but working less intensively than before	21
Total	100

Becoming established

How does an artist become established? Is it a gradual process or is there an event or change of circumstance that propels the artist across the threshold into full professional status? Artists in the survey who indicated they were established, or established but working less intensively, were asked if they could identify a single moment in their career when they felt they had made it as a practising professional artist.

The great majority of these artists were able to point to a single event that marked their transition to full establishment as an artist. For most it was their first big break—the first serious professional engagement for an actor or dancer, the first significant published work for a writer, the first solo show or important commission for a visual artist, and so on.

Table 18 shows that 42 per cent of artists in our survey nominated such an occurrence as the moment of their establishment. Among the remainder, 14 per cent identified the transitional moment as being the time when they first earned income and 12 per cent saw it as the completion of their training or their first regular work. Further details are given in Appendix I Table 6.2.

	Proportion of all established artists(a) %
Completion of training	6
First income earned as an artist	14
First professional engagement, solo show, publication	42
First regular work	6
Other	16
Unable to identify a single moment	16
Total	100

(a) Proportions are of artists who indicated they were either established or established but working less intensively than before.

For established artists, the mean age at which this status was achieved was 30 years, with the majority (70 per cent) reaching this point before the age of 35 (see Table 19 and Appendix I Table 6.3). Nevertheless, some artists flourish late, with 5 per cent of respondents not becoming established until after the age of 55. This pattern of starting late or late development is particularly noticeable among writers, visual artists and craft practitioners. Dancers and musicians, on the other hand, are far more likely to become established at an early age—significant numbers of practitioners in these artforms are established before the age of 25.

Age (years)	Proportion of all established artists(a) %
< 25	35
25–34	35
35–44	19
45–54	7
55–64	3
65 +	2
Total	100
Mean age	30 years
Median age	28 years

(a) Proportions are of artists who were established or established but working less intensively than before and who could identify a single moment of establishment.

First income

For many artists, earning their first income from art practice is a significant milestone in their career. For a number of artists, this occurs early—earning small amounts of money for work sold or from engagements secured during student days, for example. More than 40 per cent of artists in our survey reported that they had earned some income before they completed their training (see Table 20). A further one-third of artists earned their first income within 3 years of completing their training. Significantly, 15 per cent of artists had to wait more than 3 years before receiving any income from their artistic practice. As seen from the more detailed results shown in Appendix I Table 6.4, this delay in remuneration is especially noticeable among writers, composers and visual artists, whereas performing artists are more likely to begin earning income much earlier in their careers.

Table 20 Artists' first income

First income earned in PAO:	Proportion of all artists %
Before completion of training	43
Within three years of completing training	36
More than three years after completing training	15
Don't know or no income earned yet	7
Total	100

Factors advancing artists' professional development

The rate of professional development of artists, and their success in achieving their artistic goals as their career advances, is affected by a number of factors. Some are positive, helping the artist to progress, whereas some are negative, retarding growth and frustrating development.

On the positive side, many observers within and outside the arts would argue that the ultimate determinant of success as an artist is, and always has been, that elusive innate quality called talent. Thus, it is expected that if artists are asked to nominate the most important factors affecting the progression of their career, talent would be high on the list. Indeed, as Table 21 shows, almost one-third of artists indicated that talent was the most important factor advancing their professional development, and about one-quarter saw it as the most important factor influencing their success at the present time.

The other major factor seen as advancing artistic progress is support and encouragement from teachers, family, friends and professional colleagues. Training is also seen as having been important to overall career development, though its immediate importance at the present time is not felt to be so strong.

Table 21 Most important factor advancing professional development of artists

	Proportion of artists nominating factor as most important in advancing their professional development:	
	Throughout career %	At present time %
Talent	31	26
Training	24	16
Financial assistance or lucky break	6	8
Opportunity to publish, perform, or exhibit at a critical time	6	9
Support from family/friends/teachers/peers	26	30
Other factors	7	11
Don't know or can't say	–	2
Total	100	100

– indicates nil response in this sample.

The detailed results shown in Appendix I Tables 6.5 and 6.6 reveal interesting comparisons between artforms. Writers, actors, musicians and composers see talent as the most significant factor advancing their professional development throughout their careers, whereas for dancers it is the rigorous formal training which they must undergo.

For craft practitioners, and for community cultural development workers, it is the support and encouragement from those around them that is the most important factor. When considering factors affecting artists at the present time, support and encouragement becomes a more important factor for most artists, along with some increase in the importance of the opportunity to publish, perform, exhibit, or the receipt of funding at a critical moment.

Factors holding back artists' professional development

Turning to the negative side, what factors are most likely to inhibit the development of a career as a professional artist? Evidence from earlier surveys of artists, both in Australia and in other countries,

suggests two major factors—financial problems and time constraints. The former arise from a variety of sources, including lack of work opportunities in the artist’s artform, lack of financial return from creative practice, and lack of access to funding or other financial support.

Time constraints—a lack of time to do creative work—arise through a variety of external pressures and responsibilities. To some extent the two overlap, since in many cases a lack of time is caused by the necessity of taking on other paid work in order to earn an income.

The results of this survey amply confirm earlier findings. As Table 22 shows, almost four out of five artists in our survey nominated economic factors or time constraints as the most important factor inhibiting their professional development, both in the long-term (throughout their career) and in the present. Other less important factors include difficulties in accessing training, materials or markets, personal issues, and discrimination.

It is essentially lack of work opportunities that holds back the development of performing artists, whereas lack of return from the creative practice is more significant for visual artists, craft practitioners, composers and writers (see Appendix I Tables 6.7 and 6.8 for more details).

Table 22 Most important factor inhibiting professional development of artists

	Proportion of artists nominating factor as most important in inhibiting their professional development:	
	Throughout career %	At present time %
Lack of work opportunities	24	26
Lack of financial return from creative work	27	22
Lack of access to funding or other financial support	7	6
Lack of time for creative work due to other pressures and responsibilities	20	23
Difficulty accessing training, materials, markets, etc.	7	8
Personal issues	6	7
Discrimination	1	1
Other factors	3	3
None/don’t know	4	6
Total	100	100

Finally, our survey results show the effects of caring for children on the development of artistic careers. About half of all artists have had children under their care at some point during their career. Of these, two-thirds report that the need to care for children affected their artistic career, mainly because of time restrictions this imposed.

These constraints have been especially problematic for female artists; over three-quarters of women who have had children under their care found this restricted their work as an artist, compared with just over half of male artists in the same situation. The data relating to the effects of child care are presented in detail in Chapter 10, together with further discussion of this important issue.