

CIRCUS & ENTERTAINMENT RIGGING SURVEY REPORT



A key element of TNA's Circus and Physical Theatre (CaPT) Strategy across 2019-2020

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TNA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the different land on which we meet, gather, and work, especially the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin nation where our office is based.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future.

BACKGROUND

Theatre Network Australia's consultation with the Circus and Physical Theatre (CaPT) sector across 2018 and 2019 anecdotally suggested the need for circus-specific training to be included in current Rigger accreditation. In response, TNA, in collaboration with our CaPT Advisory Group, developed and conducted a survey which provided fuller evidence of this need to inform future action.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was presented using Survey Monkey, and distributed to the sector garnering 171 individual valid responses during the period 29 May and 15 June 2019. We had responses from Riggers, Artists, Producers, Venue Managers, and Arts Managers. In addition, TNA consulted with organisations including Showtech and the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA). We thank the people who filled in the survey for their time and valuable contribution.

Survey responses indicate a clear demand for a CaPT-specific, defined, industry standard for rigging and safety. However, there are concerns as to who would be the provider of such a certification, and how the monitoring of this industry standard would happen.

Legislating industry-specific certification and standards would necessitate the establishment of specialised training requirements. On top of the technical skills needed, survey responses also highlighted that Circus rigging is a creative endeavour, and that this needs to be factored in with regards to training and certification.

There are gaps in the knowledge and understanding of CaPT rigging generally, and the level of qualification required for what scope of work, as well as the differences in what those levels of qualifications mean. There was, however, a clear sense of need and the desire for more industry/artform specific training as reported by riggers, presenters and artists/producer.

The report concludes with further discussion, outlining the need for formal changes to legislation, training standards and hiring requirements. It lists useful frameworks and models as reference for future action, and outlines ongoing advocacy actions that TNA will undertake.

ABOUT THEATRE NETWORK AUSTRALIA

*Theatre Network Australia (TNA) is the leading industry development organisation for the performing arts, prioritising independent artists and small to medium companies. Our ten year vision is for **A Safe, Healthy and Relevant Performing Arts Sector**.*

Theatre Network Australia believes in the central role that creativity plays in a society. We want a more diverse and fair performing arts sector, which puts First Nations people first. We value independent artists, small to medium companies and large organisations and we want greater interconnections between them. We believe in life-long learning. We support different models of working, and we value flexibility. We want fair pay and conditions for our sector. We know that risk and experimentation are important. And we want ongoing, respectful but challenging conversations that connect us, open new ideas, and lead to a stronger sector.

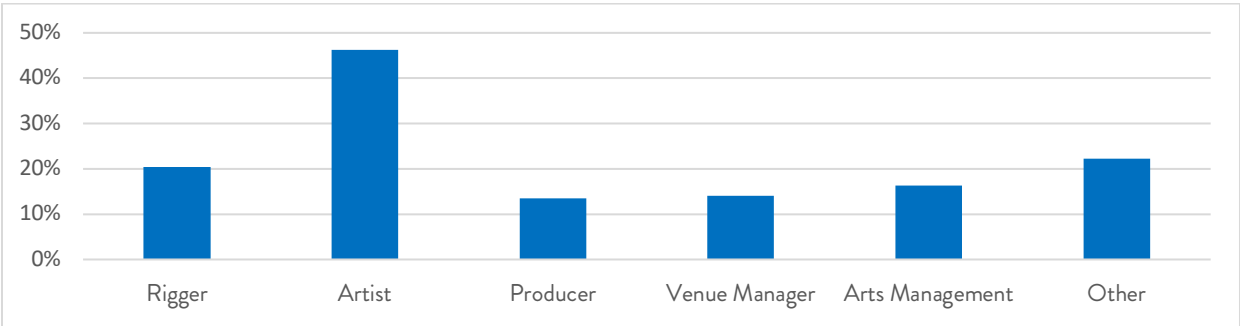
A national organisation with a dedicated Victorian program, TNA strengthens artists and arts organisations, influences cultural policy, facilitates critical debate and networking, and advocates for a robust, interconnected and innovative sector.

*To achieve our goals of **STRONGER ARTISTS & COMPANIES**; a **STRONGER ARTS SECTOR**; and a **STRONGER ORGANISATION**, we have a new set of strategies for 2020 - 2024 including advocacy, gatherings, sector development initiatives, artist development initiatives, communications, and research and evidence. We also have specific focus programs, which act as a set of strategies to achieve our objectives: our **ASSITEJ** strategy for the theatre and young people sector; our strategy for Circus and Physical Theatre; our new work with the Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM); and our new Victorian Independent Producers Initiative.*

Theatre Network Australia's initial CaPT Strategy was rolled out in 2017, following two Sector Reviews commissioned by Creative Victoria and undertaken by Andrew Bleby and Associates. Previously, the Australian Circus & Physical Theatre Association (ACAPTA) was the peak body and service organisation for the growing contemporary circus and physical theatre sector between 2004 – 2017, following a rich history of development of the sector.

SURVEY RESPONDENT STATISTICS

Respondents by Primary Practice



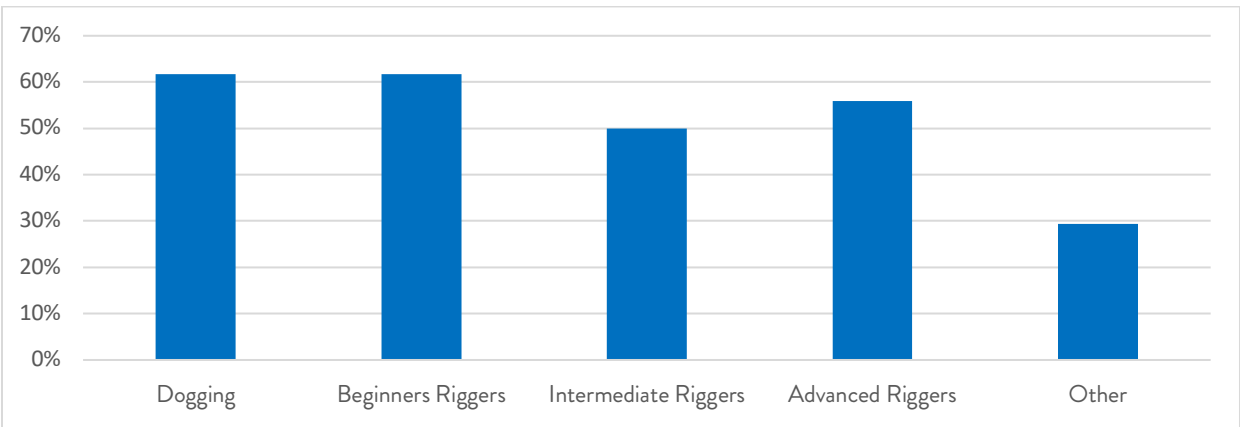
NOTE: Respondents identified with multiple practices, as is consistent across the independent arts sector.

Of the 35 respondents who identified their primary practice as Riggers, 13 also identified as Artists; 4 as Producers; 5 as Venue Managers; and 7 identified as Other, which included Designers, Mechanists, Technicians, and Production Managers.

Representation

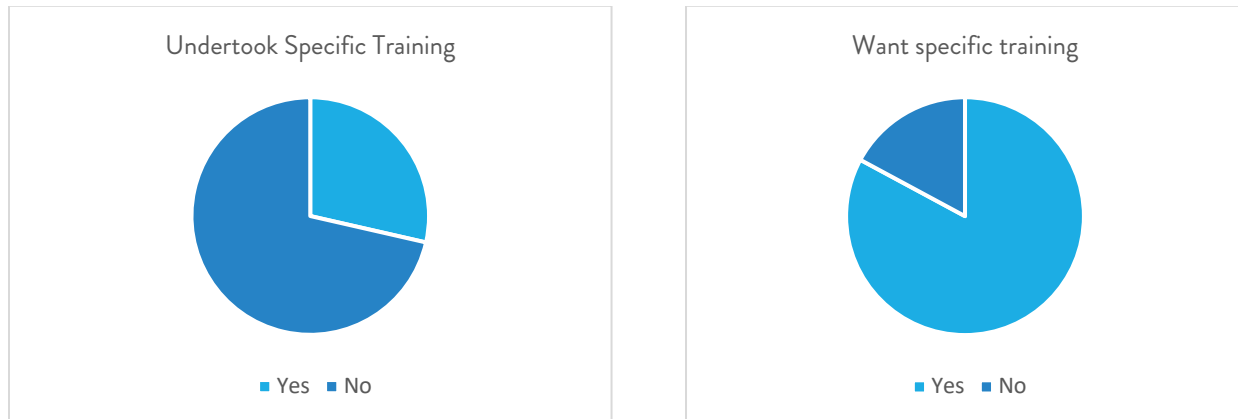
Of the total respondents, 6 identified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD); 3 identified as living with disability; 20 identified as LGBTQI+; 22 identified with living and working regionally; and 25 as early-career artists.

RIGGER QUALIFICATIONS



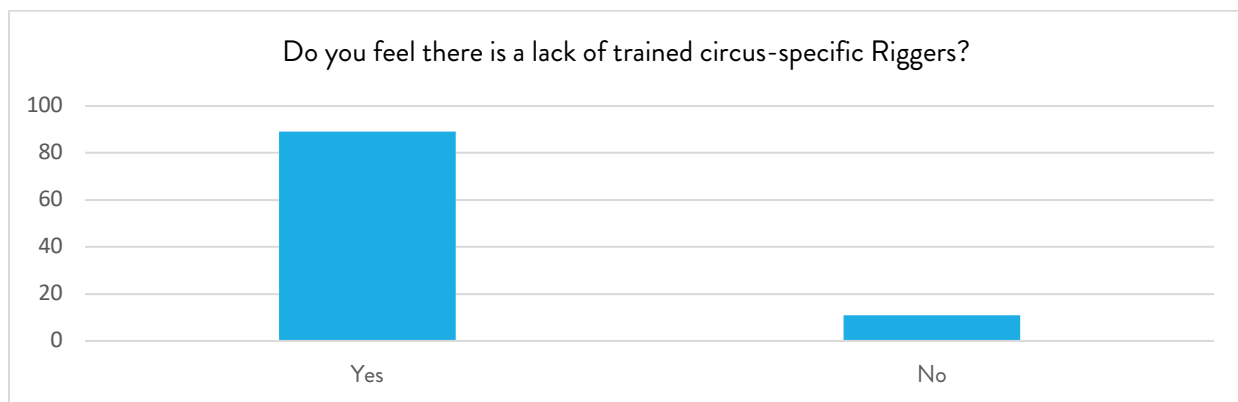
The main qualifications riggers have are Dogging (61.76%) and Beginners Riggers (61.76%), noting that most riggers have more than one qualification.

Of the 35 riggers, only 10 agree that the courses they undertook to gain their rigging tickets provided circus or live entertainment industry-specific information, tuition or training. 2 attended Showtech's basics course prior to the 2010 changes to RTO requirements¹, 3 had instructors who were aware of their specific needs.



83% of respondents who were riggers would like to undertake industry-specific training.

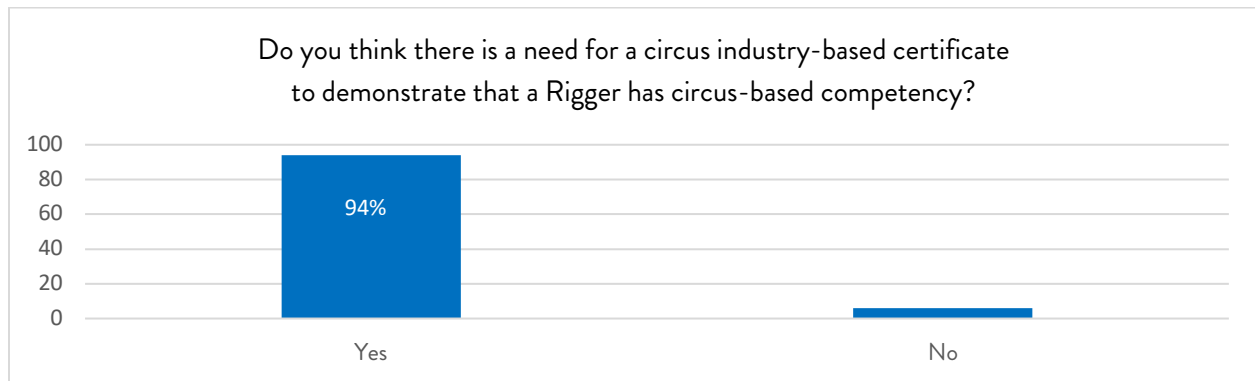
SENSE OF THE CURRENT SITUATION



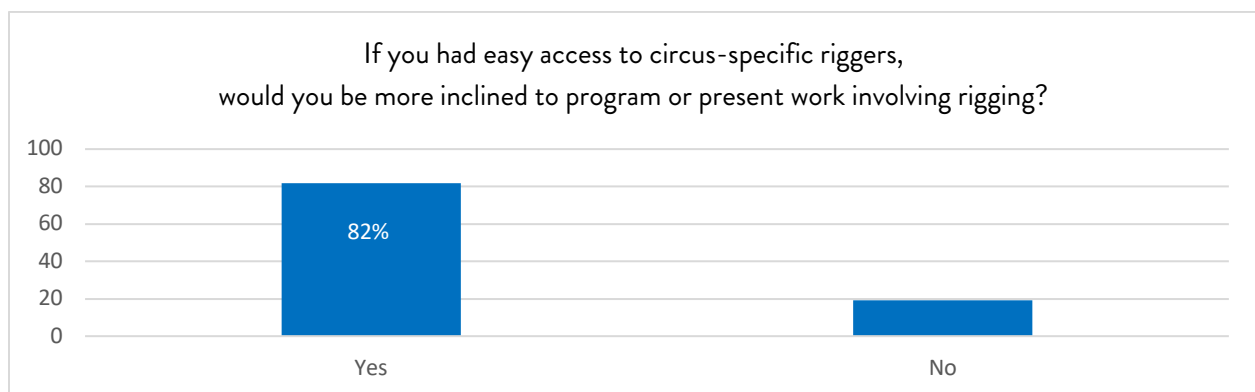
Overwhelmingly, 88.98% of respondents feel that there is currently a lack of trained circus-specific Riggers.

¹ <https://showtechtraining.com.au/collections/showtech-courses/products/worksafe-rigging-licences>

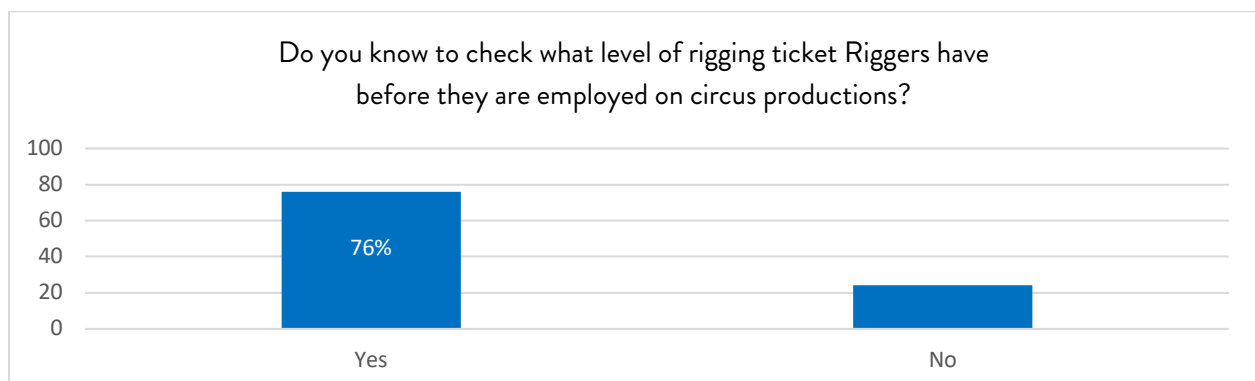
SECTOR NEEDS

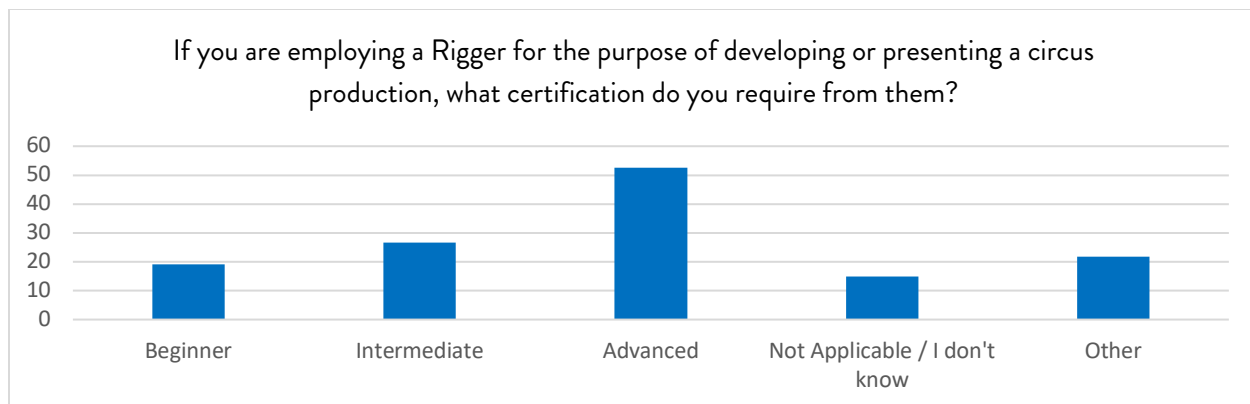


PRESENTERS' NEEDS



SECTOR KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING





The level of certification required is not determined by legislation, but dependent on the minimum as required by individual venue policy. Respondents also noted that the hiring of Riggers often occurs through recommendations from other riggers and peers, thus relying on word of mouth and reputation.

SURVEY RESPONDENT COMMENTS

The following themes are derived from “Any Other Comments.”

Legislation / Industry Standards

- Rigging certification currently sits within the building industry. These certifications include Dogging, Beginners Riggers, Intermediate Riggers, Advanced Riggers, Level 1 Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA), Elevating Work Platform (EWP) Ticket, Working at Heights. However, rigging in the entertainment industry is broad, encompassing rigging in the Circus and Physical Theatre, as well as for commercial entertainment, concerts, etc.
- The survey responses indicate a demand for a CaPT-specific defined industry standard for rigging and safety. However, there are questions about who should provide such a certification, and how to monitor this industry standard.
- Establishing industry-specific standard certification and industry standards would require establishing specific training standards. On top of the technical skills needed, survey responses also acknowledge that Circus rigging is a creative endeavour, and this needs to be factored into training and certification.

Training

- Current rigging certification requires the rigger to adapt content specific to the construction industry to the Circus sector. Riggers are expected to juggle various roles and requirements: Riggers engineer and design the rig, and set up the rig, whilst considering the impact on the visual design of the performance space and/or factoring performance acts that include spinning or swinging. This relates to a lack of clarity on what the role of a rigger actually entails.
- Survey responses also reveal a perceived expectation of competency from a rigger with an advanced ticket, and an acknowledgement accidents and mistakes do happen – circus rigging knowledge is dynamic, and hence learning must be ongoing.
- Respondents who are riggers expressed a desire for more industry-specific training with “real world applications,” in order to be more equipped in their roles as riggers. They cited that their training so far has been mostly on the job and they can identify areas in which their skills and knowledge are lacking. However, cost is a barrier for them in considering further training. Respondents also noted the perceived disadvantage for women should further paid training be implemented. They are concerned with the gender imbalance of the work force, with many women taking on Circus rigging training to work solely in the Circus and Physical Theatre sector (and not more widely in the entertainment industry), thus not necessarily increasing their potential income.
- Respondents generally agree that further development in the form of more formal, structured mentoring within the Circus and Physical Theatre sector would be of benefit.

Presenter / Venue Responsibilities

- Survey responses indicate that some presenters and venues lack an understanding or awareness of the role of riggers, and more broadly of what Circus works require where rigging is concerned. Artists, producers and riggers have rarely been asked to show any proof of certification when contracted or before bumping in a venue.
- Respondents also noted venues or contractors managing venues such as at Fringe Festivals, often have not acquired engineer-certified structural reports before confirming programming Circus works that require rigging.
- Some venues do have a strict policy as per Live Performance Australia (LPA) guidelines², requiring an advanced rigging ticket, and also that riggers working on programmed shows are experienced or are working directly under experienced circus riggers. However, these guidelines are not mandatory, and only LPA member organisations are expected to uphold these.

² <https://liveperformance.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Event-Rigging-Hazard-Guide-2.pdf>

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The findings reveal the need for a complex solution between formal changes to legislation, training standards and hiring requirements, and an education and cultural shift across the sector – riggers, presenters, venue managers, artists and producers.

The formal changes to legislation, training standards and hiring requirements are beyond the capacity of TNA to deliver, however this report recommends the following frameworks which an Australian industry standard could be based upon:

- Existing models like ETCP in the United States <https://etcp.esta.org/>
- Advocate for Showtech's Entertainment Rigging For Technicians & Performers course as required companion to HRW License.

TNA will continue to advocate for the inclusion of Circus-specific training in current Rigger accreditation through the following actions:

1. Present outcomes of survey at CaPT Gatherings 2020,
2. Communicate survey outcomes to all venues through the state performing arts centres associations and the national Performing Arts Connections Australia (PACA),
3. Communicate survey outcomes through our membership base with a focus on the major companies and presenters, encouraging leadership from key organisations such as Circus Oz, Circa, NICA and flagship festivals.
4. Through TNA's Victorian Independent Producers Initiative (VIPI), program Salon discussions on technical/rigging concerns amongst independent producers and artists,
5. Facilitate ongoing discussion responsive to developments in the sector.

THEATRE NETWORK AUSTRALIA CIRCUS & ENTERTAINMENT RIGGING SURVEY REPORT 2020

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