ADVANCING THE PERFORMING ARTS

2022 REPORT

THIS IS HOW WE DO IT

TNA's Report on the Working Trends of Independent Artists and Creatives in the Performing Arts in Australia

"I want to see producers and arts organisations not default to 'Equity minimum' across the board but rather consider artists' experience, length of time in the industry, profile, and budget accordingly."

-Independent Artist

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THE 2022 SURVEY

How

This report analyses results from 297 complete, valid responses from independent artists and creatives to an online survey conducted over two months from 16 May to 4 July 2022.

Independent artists and creatives from across Australia were invited to take part via call outs on social media, direct email, and communications through TNA's members and national network. To acknowledge the ongoing unpaid work that comes with being an independent artist, TNA offered a $50 payment and a complimentary three-month membership for the time taken to complete the survey.

The survey asked questions about working conditions, financial arrangements, personal and business management, and individually set working rates. Conducted on Survey Monkey, it is the third survey by TNA with a focus on independent practitioners in the performing arts. The 2022 survey asked many of the same questions as previous years, and so provides some comparison to the results from 2018 and 2020. Additional questions were included to track new trends, such as those resulting from the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

For sections 1-4, we asked respondents to use data from 2021 activities. As section 5 analyses the ongoing and long-term impact of the pandemic (three years in), we have asked respondents to consider both 2021 and 2022 activities to paint a more accurate picture to date.

Why

THIS IS HOW WE DO IT contributes to the health of the sector by collating and publishing data that reflects the realities of making work and living as an independent artist or creative in Australia.

It de-mystifies the lives and work of independents in Australia today. We hope it leads to greater understanding, appreciation and valuing of their dedication and practice — without which so many major festivals, companies, and venues would cease to exist.

The conclusion provides some observations and recommendations, which have been informed by our ongoing work with thousands of independent artists and creatives nationally.

Notes on Terminology

TNA acknowledges the complexity of terminology that relates to a person's identity, ancestry, ability, sexual orientation and gender, and appreciates respondents who engaged with this question in the survey.

Language and identity terminology are ever-changing and by their very nature a 'term' or 'label' cannot ever represent the diversity of lived experiences that they attempt to encapsulate.

We have referenced Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse (CALD) as it is the most common term currently being used by governments and their associated arts agencies, and allows us to compare data to 2020 and 2018 responses. However, we also acknowledge it brings together a wide variety of experiences, backgrounds and beliefs that are not aligned or homogenous.

We are following guidance provided by Arts Access Victoria who preference the identity-first term 'Deaf and Disabled people'.

We use 'Trans, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse or In Another Way' after reading the guidelines 'Clear Expectations.'[1]

While these terms will shift and change, it is important to document this data — as it assists our work in achieving fairer access and representation.

[1] Clear Expectations: Guidelines for Institutions, Galleries, and Curators Working With Trans, Non-Binary and Gender Diverse Artists, Spence Messih & Archie Barry, 2019.

ABOUT TNA

TNA is a leading industry development organisation for the performing arts. We work to support the ecology of our sector, with a particular focus on **independent practitioners and small to medium companies**.

As a national organisation, TNA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the different lands on which we meet, gather, and work. We especially acknowledge the people of the Kulin nation where our office is based. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Founded by the sector in 2009, TNA works to strengthen artists and arts organisations, influence cultural policy, facilitate critical debate and networking, and advocates for **a safe, healthy, and relevant sector.**

Our Manifesto

TNA believes in the central role that creativity plays in a society. We work towards a more diverse and fairer 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 advocate for fair pay and conditions for our sector. We know that risk and experimentation are important. And we foster ongoing, respectful, and challenging conversations that connect us, open new ideas, and lead to a stronger sector.

In practical terms this means TNA:

- runs industry forums
- delivers workshops on current issues for the sector
- drives advocacy campaigns in partnership with other service organisations and the sector
- undertakes and promotes research and benchmarking
- provides advice to industry, the education sector and government
- provides information and resources through our popular E-News and the online resource library.

We design our work to address the gaps, and our approach is underpinned by a spirit of care, deep listening, and trust in the sector's capacity to make progress.

Chapter 1

THE RESPONDENTS

For the 2022 survey, the 297 respondents provided their age, years of practice, self-nominated their career stage, shared the country in which they were born, and provided information on how they identify themselves.

Age

The wide range of ages in each career category suggests that respondents begin their practice at varying stages of life and that different interpretations exist for the terms emerging, mid-career, and established (see Table 1.1).

	No. of Respondents	Average Age (years)	Age Range (years)
All	297	41	20 - 80
Emerging	97	31	20 - 77
Mid-Career	122	40	21 - 80
Established	78	54	27 - 77

Table 1.1: *No. of respondents, average age of respondents, and age range of respondents by career stage*

Career Stage

There is a fairly even representation across career stages, with the years of practice varying from one year (4 respondents) to 50 years (3 respondents) (See Figure 1.1).

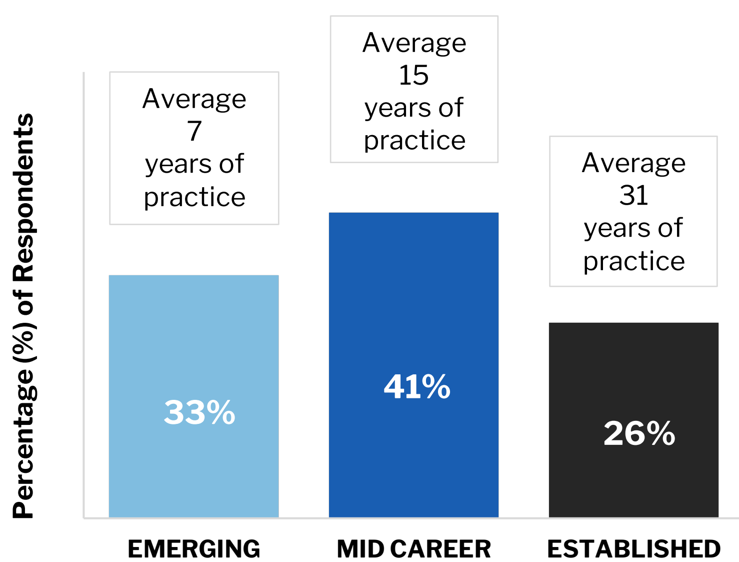

Figure 1.1: *Percentage of respondents by career stage*

Location

The location of respondents (see Figure 1.2) is consistent with our 2020 survey. It is reflective of our membership structure and the TNA 'T' model, which provides a broad level of advocacy, research and communications across the country, and a deep program of activity in Victoria.

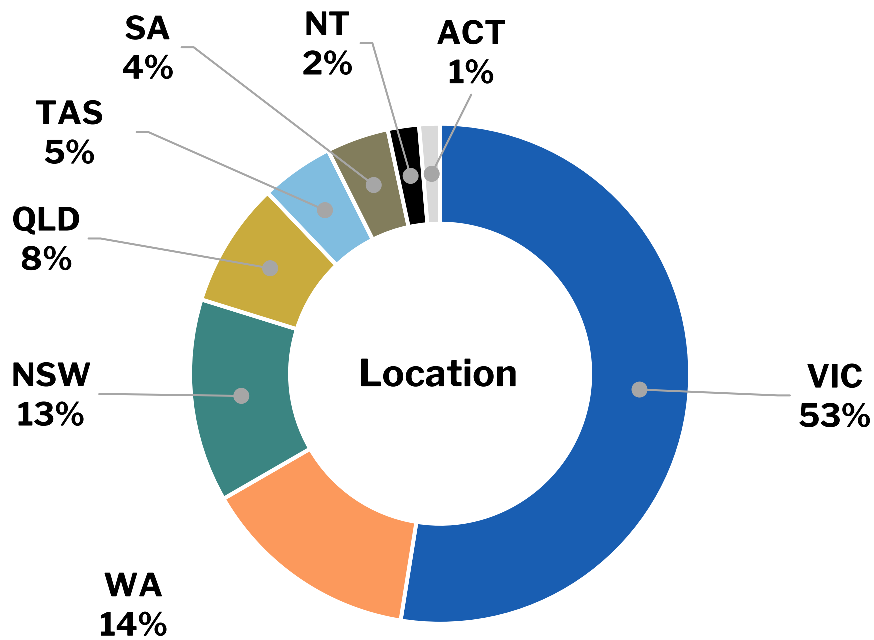

Figure 1.2: *Percentage of respondents by state*

Geography

There was an increase in respondents living regionally and remotely in 2022 compared to 2020 (see Figure 1.3).

Urban 79%	Down from 85% in 2020
Regional 18%	Up from 14% in 2020
Remote 3%	Up from 1% in 2020

Figure 1.3: *Percentage of respondents by geographical area*

Country of Birth

Of the 297 respondents, 78% were born in Australia and 22% were born overseas.

Of those born outside of Australia:
- 8% were from the United Kingdom
- 3% were from the United States of America
- 2% were from Malaysia.

Respondents were also born in Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Romania, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Representation

Our 2022 survey respondents (see Figure 1.4) are largely not representative of the general population.

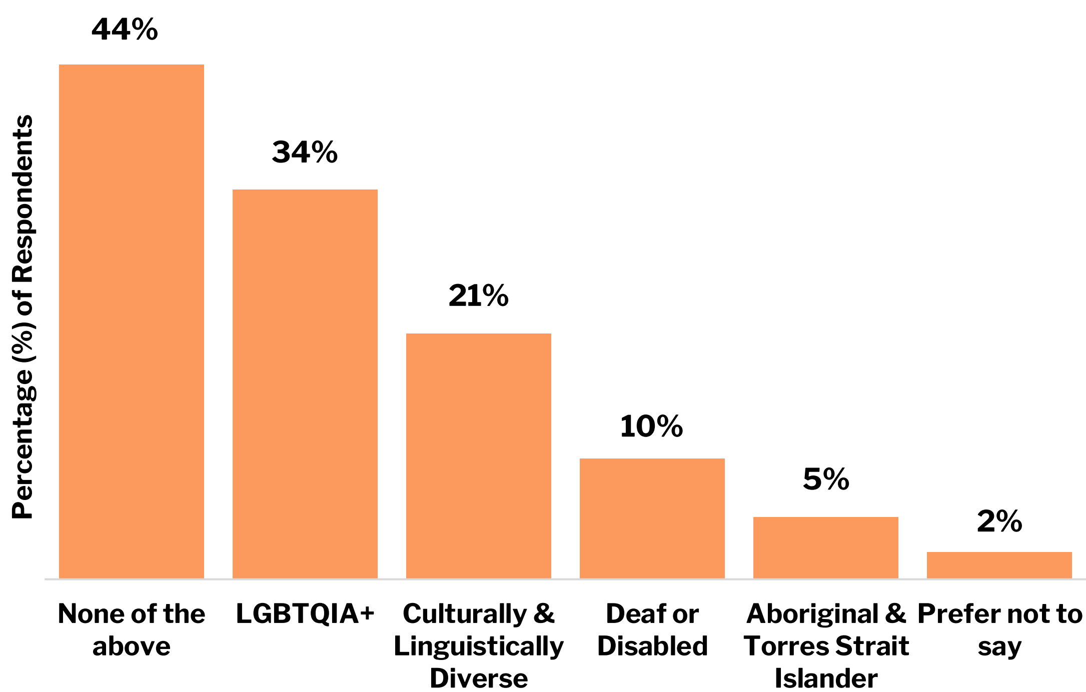

Figure 1.4: *Percentage of respondents by identity*

Of the respondents, 21% identify as Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse, which is below the 42% of Australians who identify as coming from cultural backgrounds other than a solely

Anglo-Celtic background.[2] 10% identify as a Deaf or Disabled compared to the 13% of people who are Deaf or Disabled[3] in the working age population.[4]

By contrast, 34% of respondents identify as LGBTQIA+ compared with the 11% estimation for the general Australian population.[5]

This year, 5% were Aboriginal &/ Torres Strait Islander, compared to 2% in 2020– this is more than the 3.2% estimate for the general Australian population.[6]

Representation at Career Stage

Respondents who are Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Aboriginal &/ Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), LGBTQIA+, or Deaf or Disabled are less likely to be established compared to those in the 'None of the Above' category (see Figure 1.5).

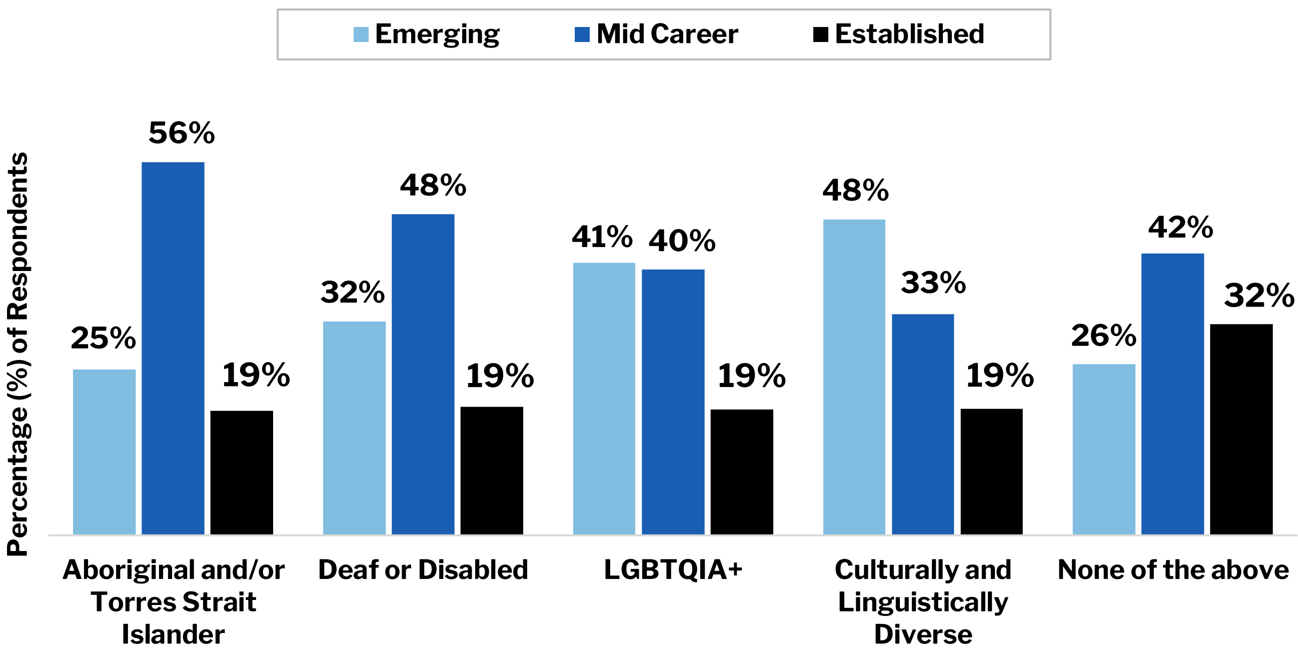

Figure 1.5: *Representation across career stages*

Almost 50% of CALD respondents are emerging, which may indicate there are fewer barriers to entering the arts profession compared to previous years.

[2] Toward Equity Report 2021, Australia Council.
[3] We used working population instead of general population as the percentage of disabled people increases with age.
[4] People with Disability in Australia 2022, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
[5] Toward Equity Report 2021, Australia Council.
[6] Census 2021, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Gender

Gender representation is consistent with previous surveys, with majority of respondents identifying as female (see Figure 1.6).

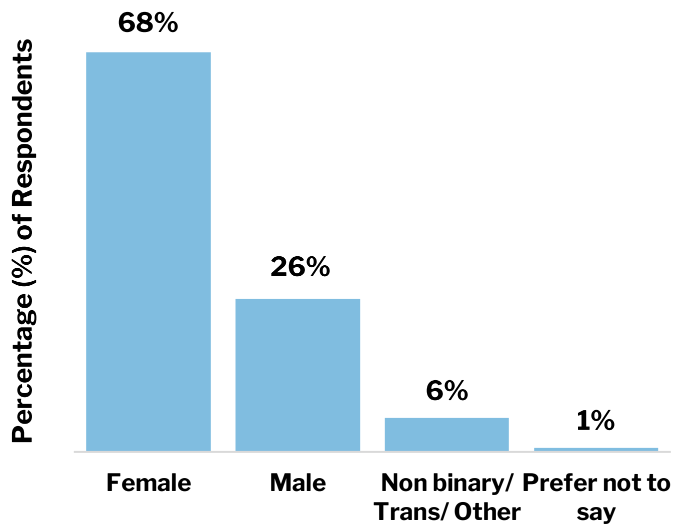

Figure 1.6: *Percentage of respondents by gender*

Chapter 2

THE ART

Respondents are working across different artforms, in multiple roles across projects, and with varied working arrangements.

Artform

This year, in response to feedback from indies, respondents could select up to three artforms if applicable, instead of only one.

Most respondents identified one of their artforms as Theatre (see Figure 2.1).

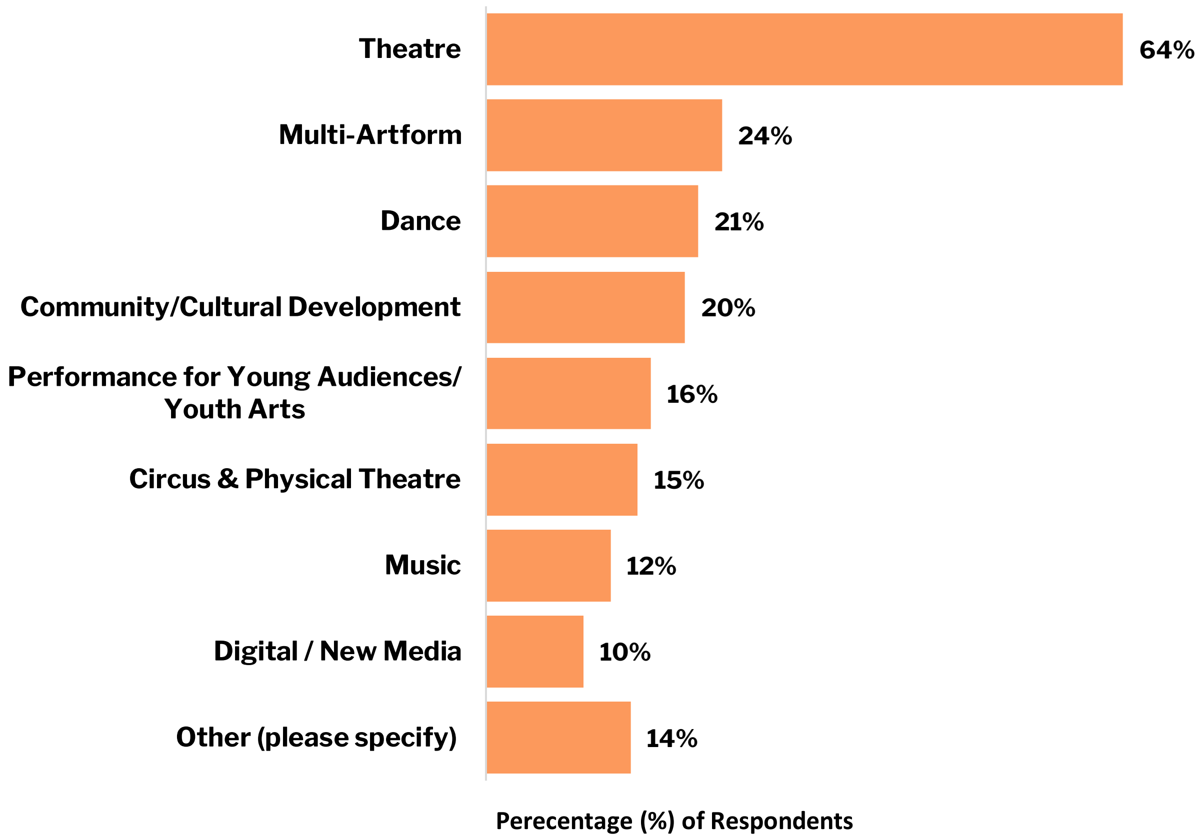

Figure 2.1: *Percentage of respondents by artform*

'Other' respondents work in the areas of Live Art, Participatory Art, Social Practice, Experimental Practice, Puppetry, Music Theatre, Opera, Cabaret, Burlesque, Comedy, Poetry, Spoken Word, Fiction, Arts Journalism and Criticism, New Writing, Literature, Photography, Performance Art, Screen, and Craft.

Roles

To examine how independent practitioners define themselves, we asked for respondents' focus areas in their art practice. This year, we allowed respondents to select up to three focus areas, up from a maximum of two in previous surveys.

Roles added by respondents were: Music Creator, Composer, Sound Artist, Video Artist, Digital Creator & Technology Innovation, Consultant, Puppeteer, Journalist, Cultural Development Worker, Academic, Researcher, Cinematographer, Devised Performance Maker, Facilitator, Photographer, Socially-Engaged / Community and Cultural Development Practitioner, Actor, Systems Consultant, Solo theatre artist.

Only 12% selected one focus area. This indicates that respondents do not necessarily see one specific role as their main focus. Independents fulfil multiple roles, sometimes within the same project or across varying projects within the year.

'Producer' was the second most selected role this year (see Figure 2.2), compared to being the eighth most selected role in 2020. This may suggest that a) more independents are self-producing even though it might not be their primary or secondary practice; b) there are more independents working as producers compared to previous years; c) there is more literacy around what a producer is.

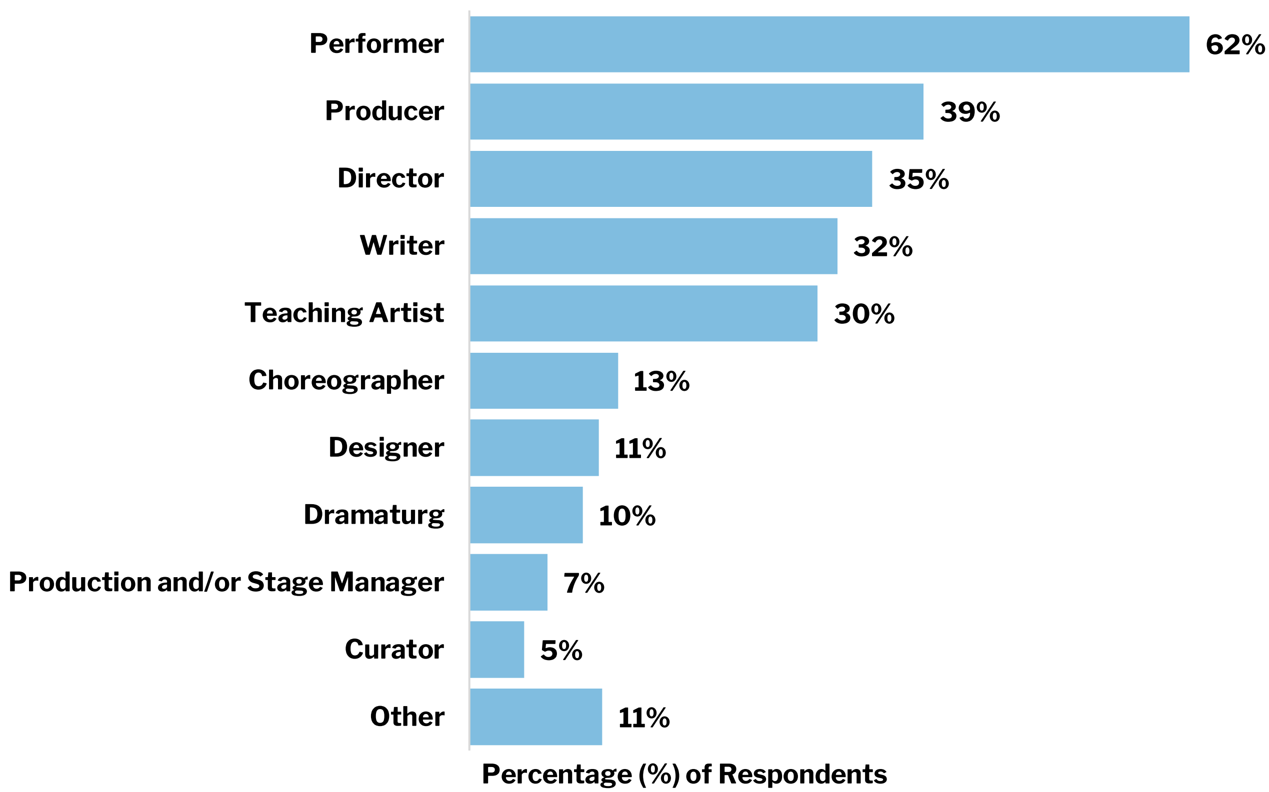

Figure 2.2: *Percentage of respondents by roles*

Working Arrangements

We asked respondents about their working arrangements on creative projects (see Figure 2.3) — whether they are the lead creative or work more on projects initiated by others. This year, we allowed respondents to select up to two options, compared to only one in previous years. The majority are creating their own work and projects which is consistent with our findings in the 2018 and 2020 reports.

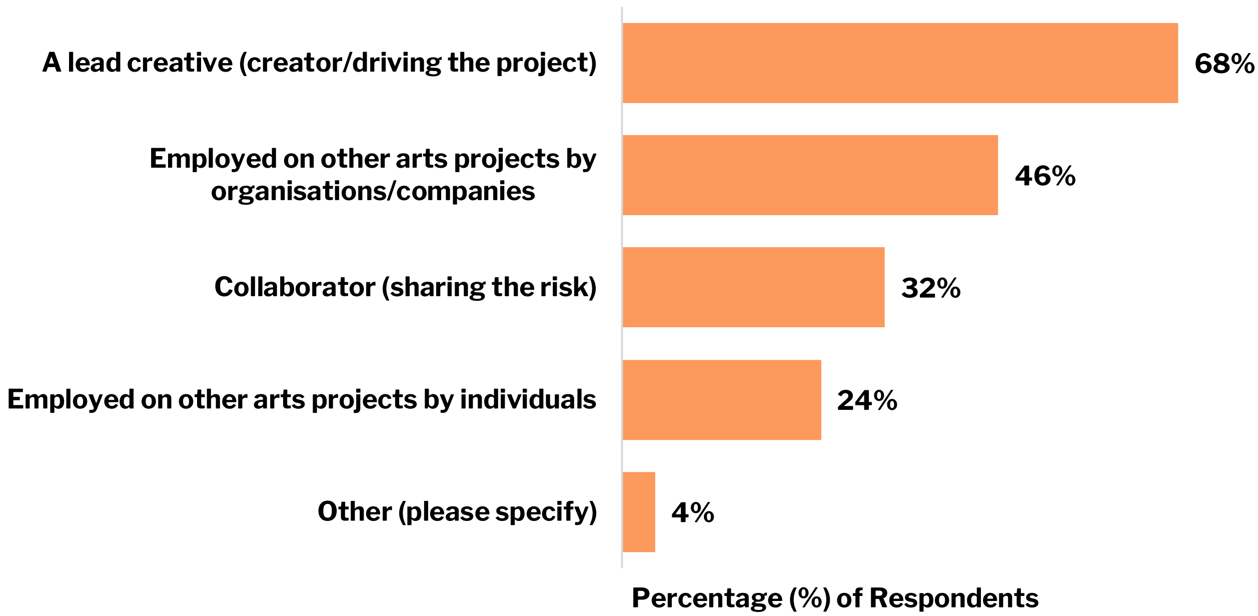

Figure 2.3: *Percentage of respondents by working arrangements*

Many who answered 'Other' were unable to choose one and split their time between the above arrangements or were undecided on how to define their role.

With over half of the 297 respondents being the lead creative on projects, the amount of artistic practice driven by individuals within the sector is significant.

Number of Creative Projects Worked Per Year

Respondents worked on half the number of creative projects in 2022 compared to 2020 (see Figure 2.4). This is likely due to the impact of COVID-19 on our sector.

However, established practitioners experienced the greatest drop in number of projects, from 16 in 2020 to 6 in 2022. Respondents across all career stages worked on a similar number of projects in 2022, compared to 2020 when established practitioners worked on twice as many projects as emerging practitioners.

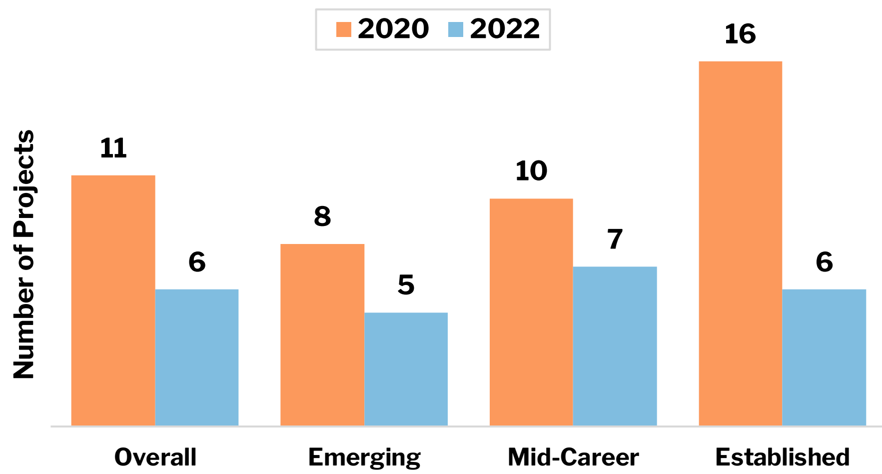

Figure 2.4: *Average number of creative projects per year by career stage*

Producers and performers experienced the greatest drop in number of projects, compared to choreographers and directors who were the least affected (see Figure 2.5).

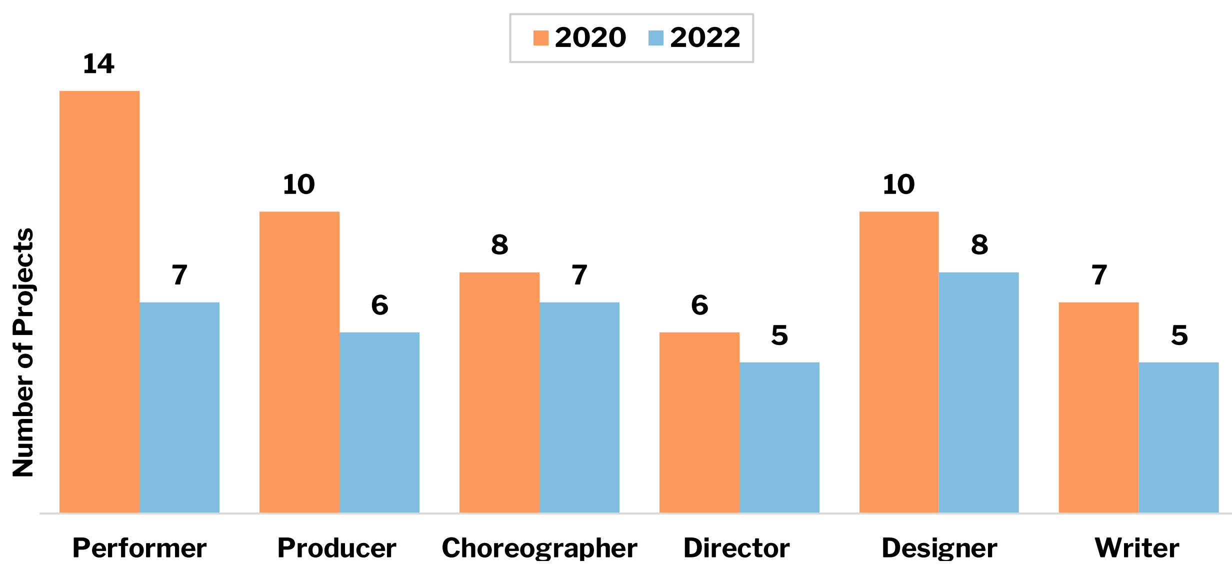

Figure 2.5: *Average number of projects per year by role*

Working Exclusively in Creative Practice by Career Stage

The percentage of respondents working exclusively in their creative practice without other employment has dropped across all career stages since the 2020 survey (see Figure 2.6). More than twice as many established respondents worked exclusively in their creative practice than emerging respondents, though they did not necessarily work on many more projects (as per Figure 2.4).

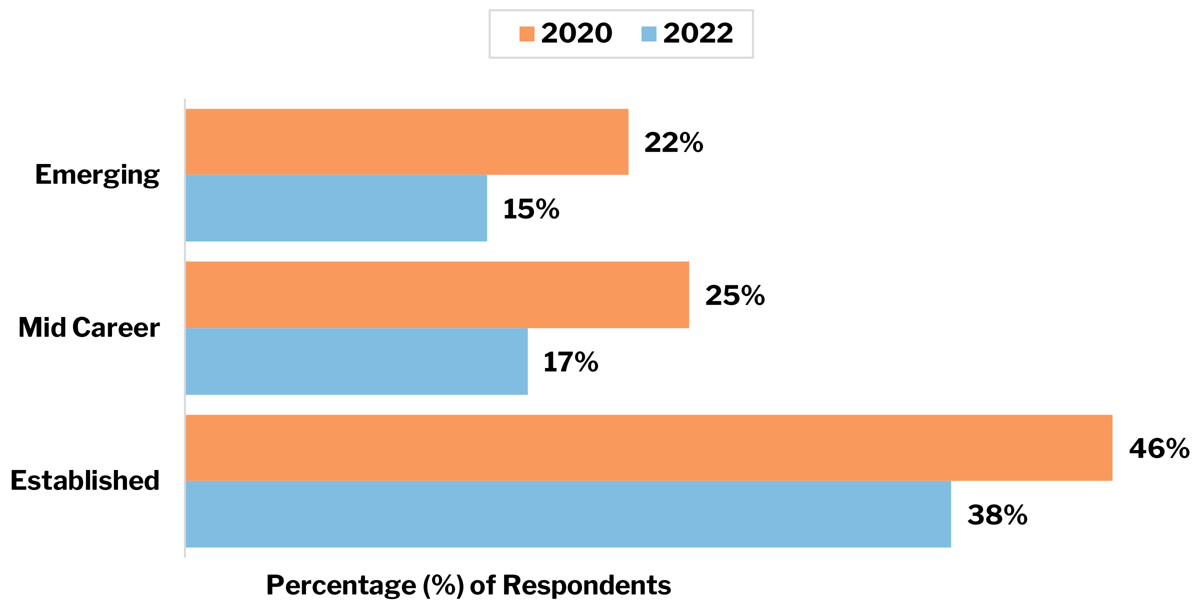

Figure 2.6: *Percentage of respondents working exclusively in creative practice by career stage*

Hours Per Week Spent on Creative Practice

Only 53% of respondents spent over 20 hours a week on their creative practice, down from 67% in 2020 (see Figure 2.7). This is consistent with respondents working on fewer creative projects in 2022.

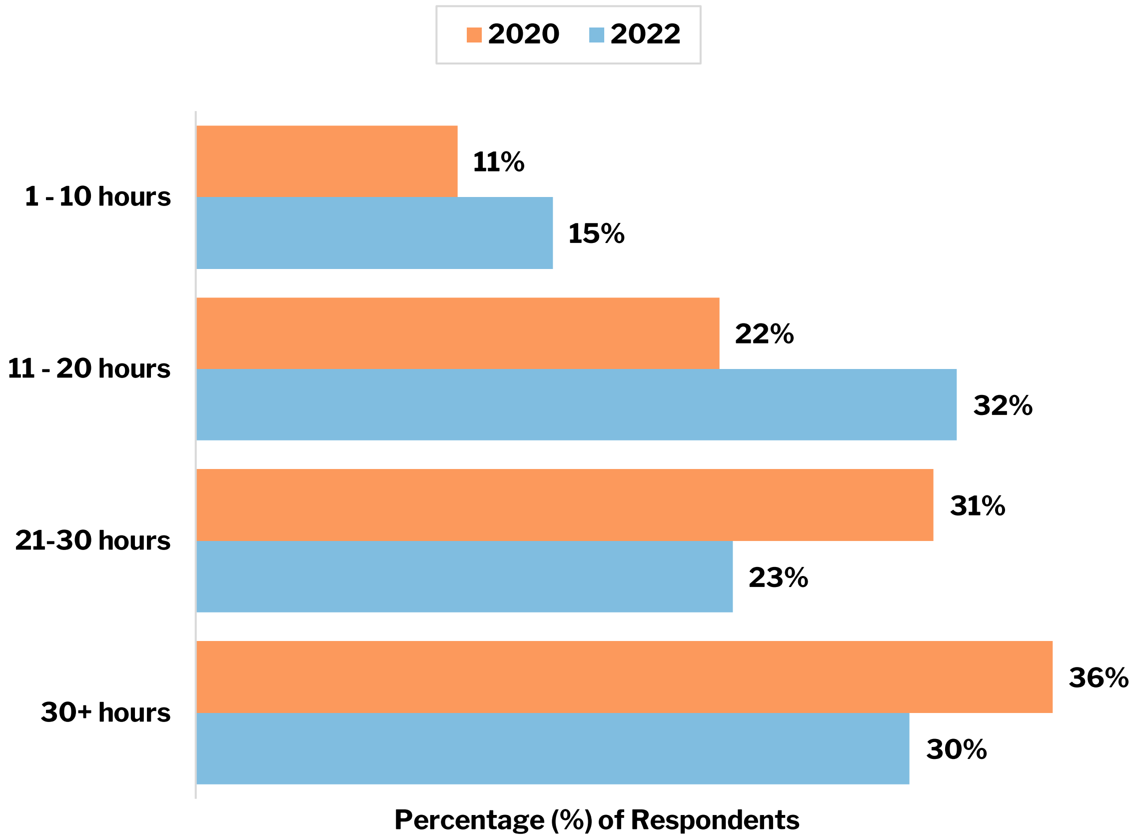

Figure 2.7: *Hours per week spent on creative practice*

Chapter 3

THE OTHER WORK

Other Employment

Most independents surveyed split their time between creative projects and other employment to earn money. 78% of respondents maintain some form of employment outside of their creative practice, with some engaged in more than one job.

There are more respondents working outside their creative practice in 2022 compared to 2020, likely due to the inability to earn an income solely from art during the pandemic.

Casual employment continues to be the most common type of employment held by independents (see Figure 3.1), making them particularly vulnerable financially, but perhaps providing the flexibility they need to deliver creative projects.

46% of emerging respondents and 42% of mid-career respondents maintain casual employment, which drops to around 33% for established respondents. Conversely, only 15% of emerging respondents and 17% of mid-career respondents work exclusively on creative projects, which increases to 38% of established respondents (Figure 2.6).

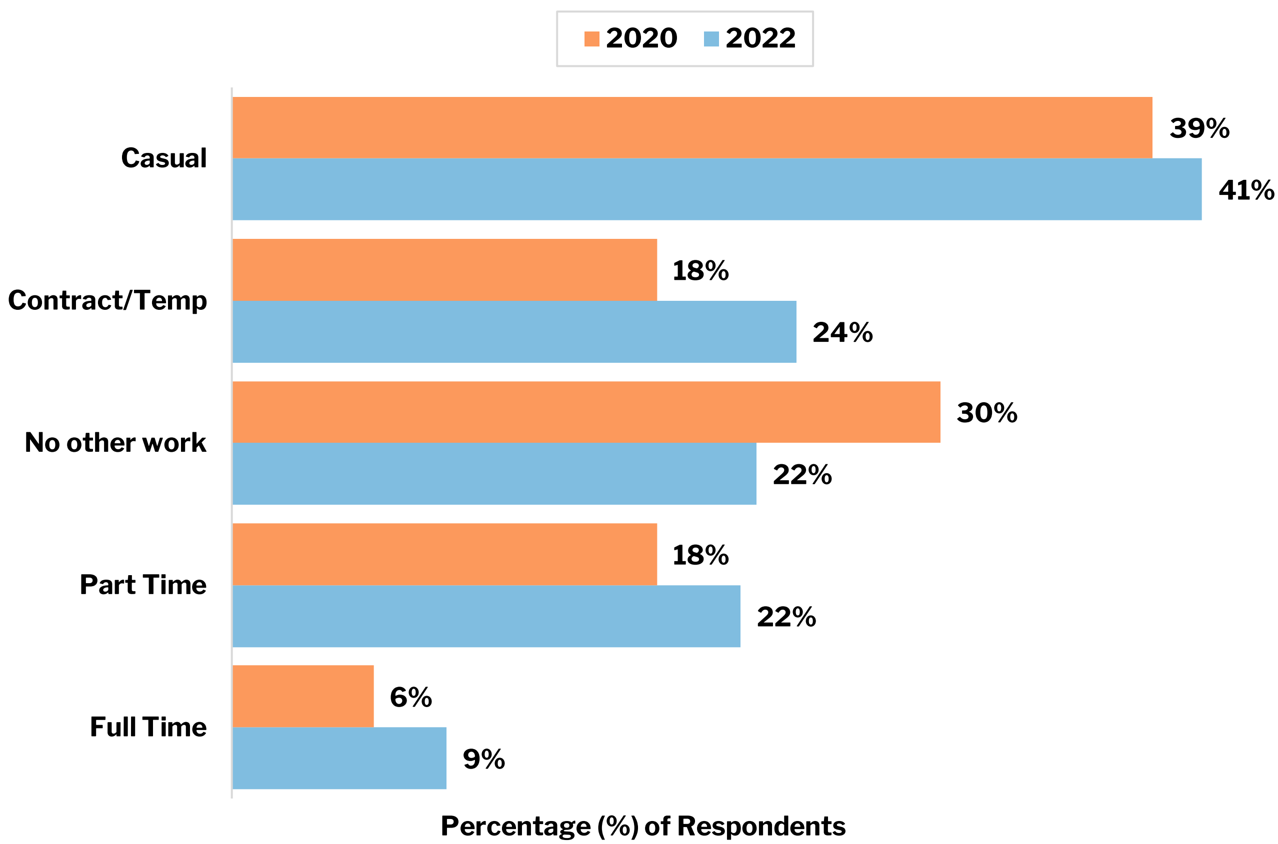

Figure 3.1: *Percentage of respondents employed outside creative practice by employment type*

Industries of Other Employment

Money earned by independents outside of their creative practice is still very reliant on the performing arts sector in areas such as Arts Management/Admin, Front of House/Venue/ Events, and Education (see Figure 3.2).

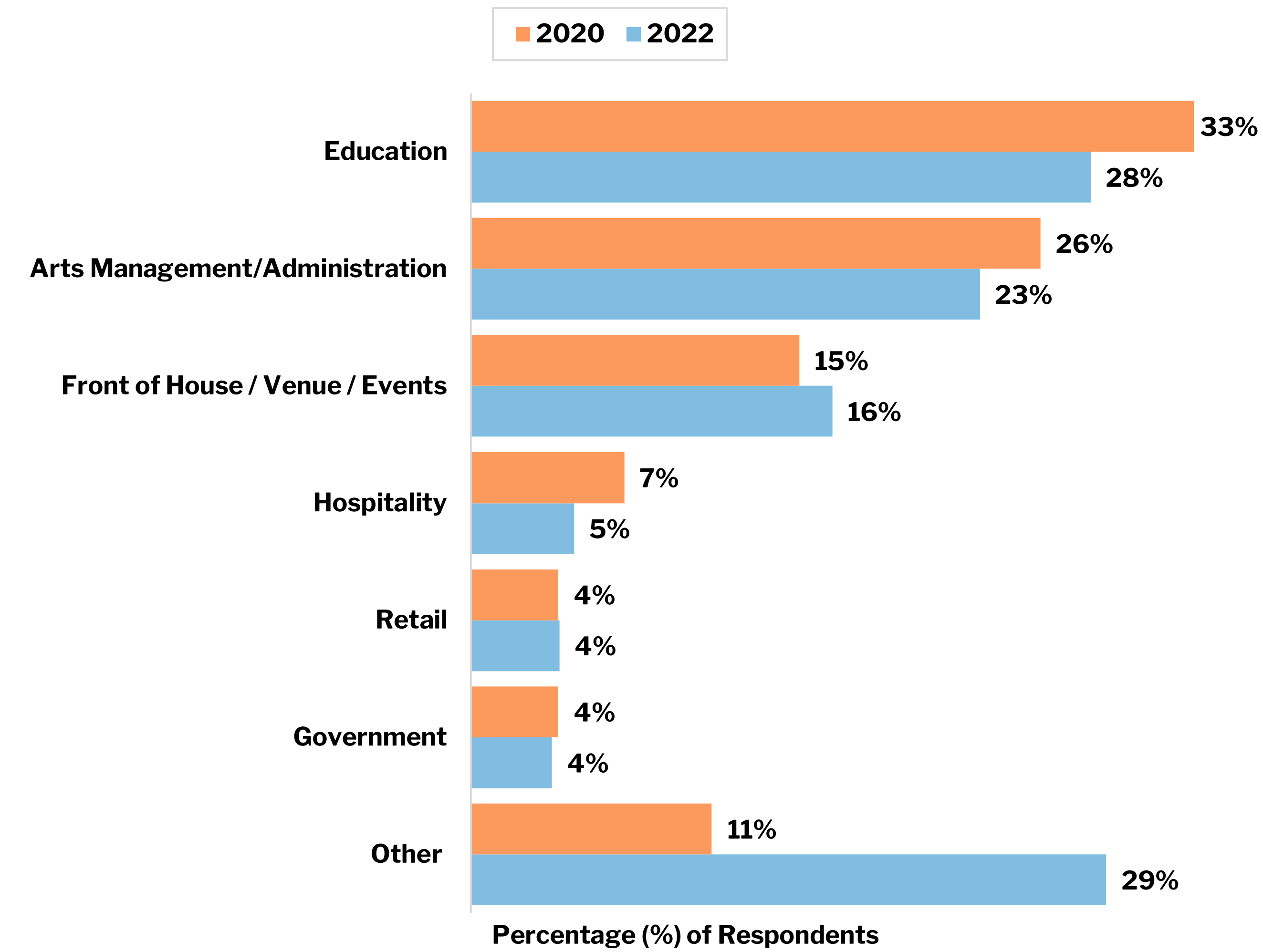

Figure 3.2: *Percentage of respondents employed in other industries*

However, there is an almost threefold increase in respondents working in 'Other' industries in 2022 compared to 2020. Other industries/work include: disability, health, allied health, medical administration, cleaning, support work, delivery and transport, fitness and sport, media, marketing, publishing, journalism, general administration, policy, town planning, face painting, balloon twisting, Feldenkrais, social research, audio description, IT, AV technician, tourism, yoga, gardening, construction, engineering, events, community services, social work, seamstress, life modelling, circus rigging, accounting & payroll, tax consultant, legal industry, customer service, science, architecture, public health operations, and surveillance officer.

Other Commitments

To obtain a fuller picture of how independents spend their time, we asked about any other significant commitments respondents had in addition to their creative practice and other employment (see Figure 3.3).

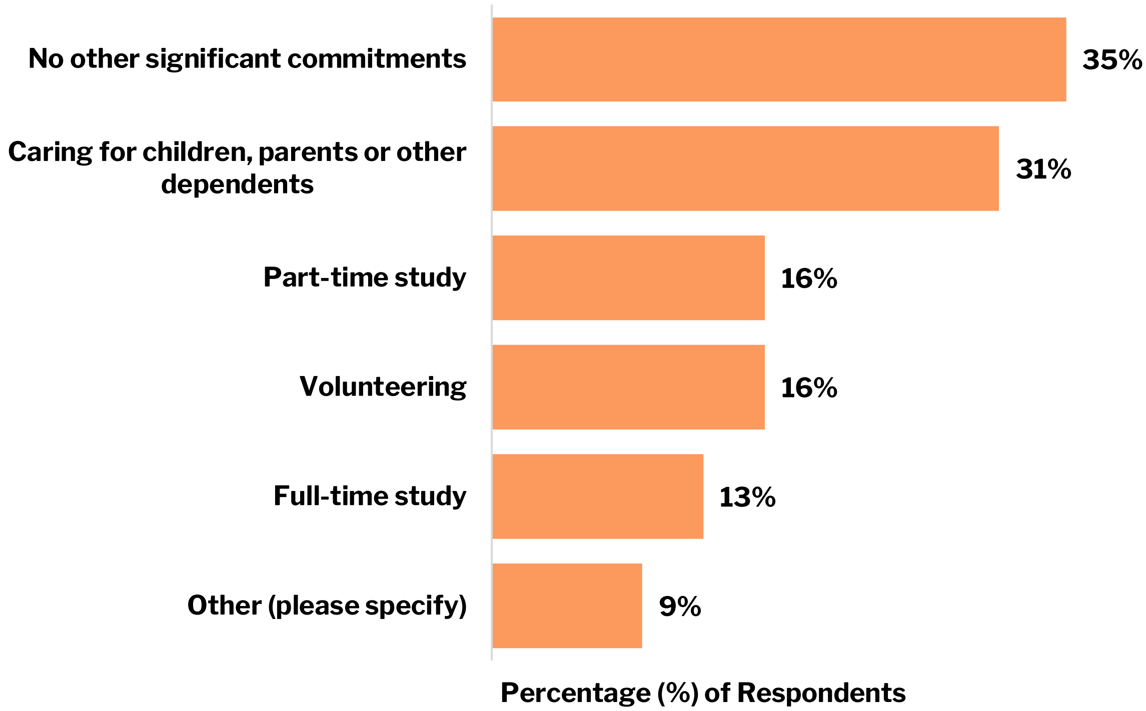

Figure 3.3: *Percentage of respondents with commitments apart from creative projects and other employment*

65% had other significant commitments, such as full-time study, part-time study, caring for dependents and volunteering. Other commitments respondents listed included ongoing medical appointments, recovery from physical and mental health, home renovations, moving house, team and competitive sport, looking for work, home schooling children during lockdowns, and learning new technology.

44% of emerging respondents are undertaking full-time or part-time study, compared to 27% of mid-career respondents and 16% of established respondents.

Chapter 4

THE MONEY

We regularly field requests from independent creatives for fee benchmarking in a range of employment circumstances. Here we ***average the figures provided by respondents*** for common activities to get a sense of the ***current 'going rates'*** (see Tables 4.1 to 4.5) We also sought insight into the factors they take into consideration when setting rates.

These numbers were calculated from respondents who charge for their time — many respondents working for Unfunded Artists or Collectives do not charge any fees.

Working with Different Employers

	Established Organisations	Funded Artists or Collectives	Unfunded Artists or Collectives
OVERALL	$63.21/hour $1316.76/week	$50.99/hour $1087.07/week	$33.83/hour $666.81/week
EMERGING	$54.28/hour $1147.82/week	$41.39/hour $914.73/week	$30.96/hour $587.31/week
MID-CAREER	$60.71/hour $1315.38/week	$55.38/hour $1129.07/week	$34.30/hour $696.80/week
ESTABLISHED	$77.85/hour $1528.40/week	$56.03/hour $1240.40/week	$37.23/hour $731.81/week

Table 4.1: *Average rates of pay by career stage, when working with different employers*

Average Fees Charged for One-Off Engagements

1-HOUR OF PRIVATE TUTORING $77.18
Equal with $77.18 in 2020

EMERGING	$61.85	MID-CAREER	$84.92	ESTABLISHED	$84.52

Table 4.2: *Average rates of pay for 1-hour of private tutoring by career stage*

PLANNING AND FACILITATING A 2-HOUR MASTERCLASS $301.95
Down from $312.55 in 2020

EMERGING	$246.01	MID-CAREER	$339.62	ESTABLISHED	$312.80

Table 4.3: *Average rates of pay for planning and facilitating a 2-hour masterclass by career stage*

1-HOUR INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSION $238.05
Up from $222.23 in 2020

EMERGING	$171.18	MID-CAREER	$245.77	ESTABLISHED	$312.53

Table 4.4: *Average rates of pay for a 1-hour industry panel discussion by career stage*

WRITING AND DELIVERING A FORMAL KEYNOTE $521.91
Up from $459.01 in 2020

EMERGING	$310.16	MID-CAREER	$574.73	ESTABLISHED	$709.53

Table 4.5: *Average rates of pay for writing and delivering a formal keynote by career stage*

Notes on Rates

Many respondents included comments with their rates.

Common themes included:

- getting paid a one-off fee instead of charging hourly or weekly wages
- working on profit-share projects or working for free — especially on unfunded projects
- not actually having much agency in fee setting, and simply accepting/rejecting what is offered
- creative leads 'sacrificing' their pay so that they can offer a better fee to collaborators.

A range of reference points that assist them included:

- Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance guidelines
- Live Performance Award
- advice from agents
- National Association for Visual Arts' Schedule of Fees
- peer consultation.

Factors influencing rates charged included:

- who is running the project and their funding status
- creative outcomes, benefits, and potential for professional growth
- previous rates offered/ received
- career stage
- number of total hours required, including planning
- impact of the project

- working conditions e.g., whether there is flexibility
- financial position of the artist e.g., how much they need work at the time
- other personal and life commitments.

Most independents set rates on a case-by-case basis and do not have a standard amount they charge.

“When I have tried to [negotiate fees] it hasn't worked in my favour, so I tend to preserve my energy these days.’

“Due to the pandemic, 2021 was undoubtedly a year when pay rates were substantially lower than normal.’

“Often financial liability sits with me, which is daunting, particularly as generally one of the lowest paid workers on a project.’

“We have a huge gap at main stage level, where I am being offered work, accepting it, and then not seeing the fee until I am already committed, and feel I can't negotiate or turn down the work without hurting the relationship with a major organisation. [We] need better pay transparency and award rates.’

Access Costs

There are barriers to participating in projects as an independent, which may include (but are not limited to) being Deaf or Disabled, living regionally or remotely, and being a parent or carer. We asked respondents if they are paid for access costs, childcare costs, and/or remote/regional transport costs on top of a professional fee (see Figure 4.1).

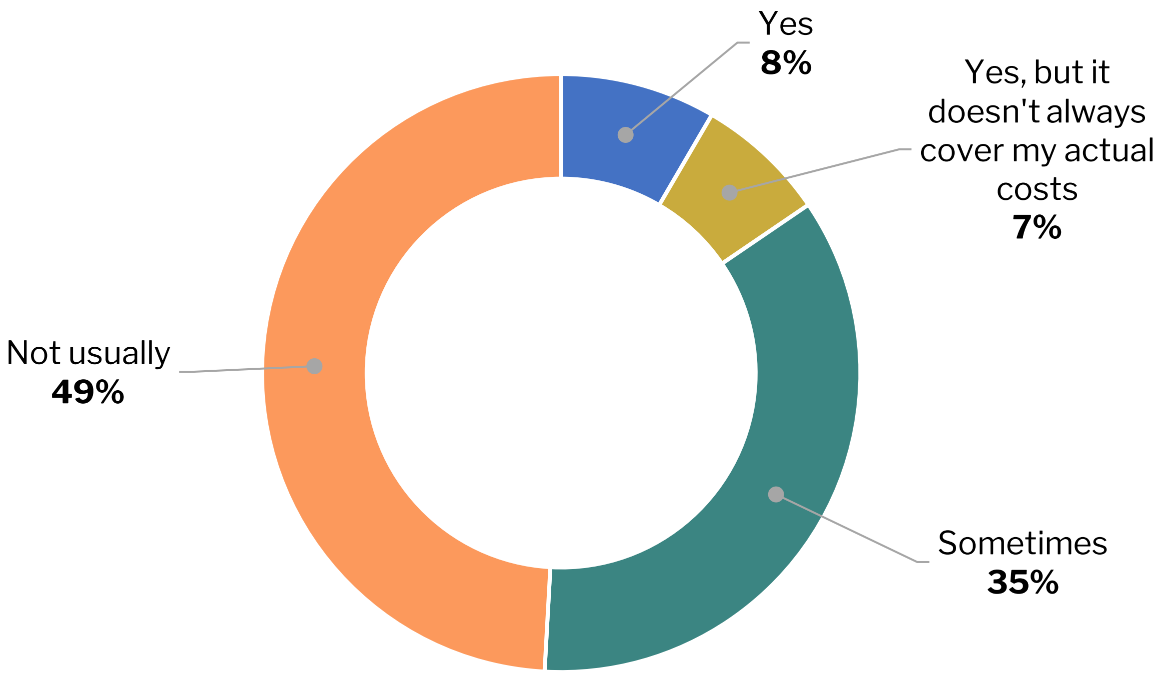

Figure 4.1: *Percentage of respondents who received payment for access, transport, childcare, or related costs*

We found that of those respondents who do incur such costs, only 8% said they were paid/reimbursed, and 7% were partially paid. This leaves an overwhelming majority who pay for access costs out of their professional fee.

"They might be talked about but never in contract.'

"Reimbursement could happen more & be offered rather than asked for.'

"You can often feel guilty asking for this payment even if it is agreed.'

“Living regionally means I need to factor in travel costs and time. I am not able to take many unfunded or part funded opportunities.’

“I used to have to take [childcare costs] out of my design fee to pay private babysitters as the hours I worked were much longer than standard public childcare facilities. It would often be 50% of my fee.’

“I am blind so sometimes I receive transport costs, which is a huge help as taxis can eat up my entire fee.’

Other Income Sources

Even with employment in other industries (on top of working in their creative practice), most independent creatives still require alternative income sources to financially sustain themselves.

About half (49%) the respondents relied on some kind of government support (see Figure 4.2)

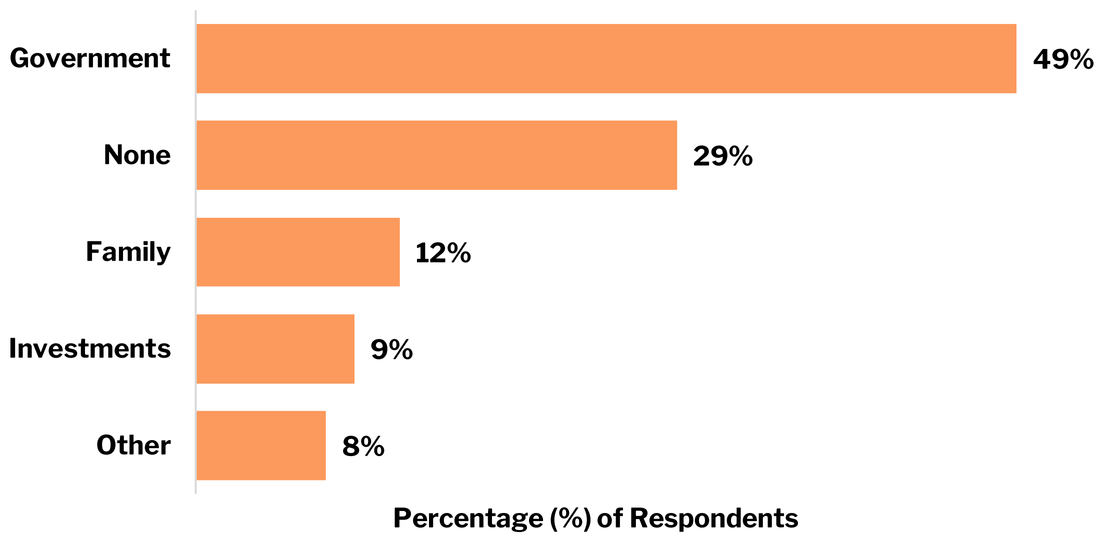

Figure 4.2: *Percentage of respondents who received other income sources (excluding income from creative practice and other employment)*

Government Support includes Services Australia, NEIS, NDIS, Covid Support, Small Business Grants, Support Act, and non-project grants.

Family generally refers to income from partners or parents, or support in the form of free accommodation.

Investments include dividends, shares, rental income, trust funds.

Other includes Patreon (crowdfunding), sale of personal items, inheritance, royalties, scholarships and awards, WorkCover.

JobSeeker and JobKeeper (until it ended in 2021) remained a substantial income source for many respondents (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Additional income sources (excluding employment and income from art); larger words indicate more frequent responses

Expenses

There are direct expenses incurred while maintaining an artistic practice, including professional development, health and wellbeing, and financial advice and services.

AVERAGE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SPEND $1,976.31
Down from $4,202.16 in 2020

EMERGING	**$2,093.30**	**MID-CAREER**	**$1,947.61**	**ESTABLISHED**	**$1,875.71**

Table 4.6: *Average professional development spend by career stage per year*

Professional development could include education, courses, workshops, attending conferences, forums or events, or anything required to keep up with the latest in the industry. The maximum spend on professional development was $20,000 and the minimum was $100.

AVERAGE HEALTH AND WELLBEING SPEND $2,467.18
Up from $1,967.24 in 2020

EMERGING	**$2,178.79**	**MID-CAREER**	**$2,537.37**	**ESTABLISHED**	**$2,716.03**

Table 4.7: *Average health and wellbeing spend by career stage per year*

The average spend on health and wellbeing has increased since 2020, alongside an increase in respondents accessing mental health services – 50%, up from 30% in 2020. The maximum spend on health and wellbeing was $25,000 and the minimum was $20.

78% of respondents sought advice or services from a registered accountant for income tax, which is close to the 77% in 2020.

Superannuation

Only 3% of respondents had no superannuation or did not know if they did, which has decreased from the 8% reported in 2020.

When an independent in the performing arts is working as an employee or as sole trader, the employer or contracting party is obligated to pay 10.5% super (at the time of writing) on top of the fee into their nominated superannuation account. From 1 July 2022, the $450 threshold has been removed, and super guarantee must be paid for all workers regardless of their fee. In addition, anyone can make personal contributions to their superannuation account.

In this survey, 33% of respondents report making personal contributions to their own superannuation, a 3% increase from the 2020 survey.

Shaping the Sector: Panels and Boards

More than half the independents surveyed (56%) are paid to be on panels. Most respondents' sentiments reflect that panel members are often under-remunerated for the amount of work involved (assessing applications and attending meetings), but that the work is satisfying, meaningful, and interesting.

Almost half the respondents (42%) also serve on boards. The vast majority of board member roles are unpaid.

One respondent commented that payment should be considered for cultural advice from First Nations board members, even if in a voluntary role – as it is specialist advice.

Alternative Economies

With the average salary from arts work at $18,000/year,[7] it is not surprising that many independents trade, swap and exchange services and items to minimise costs. 70% of respondents enter into alternative arrangements, outside of a financial contract.

These are some responses from independents about what they exchange in the course of their art practice:

- Free classes
- Space
- Technical support
- Equipment
- Administrative work
- Marketing work
- Grant writing
- Accommodation and living arrangements
- Gardening and food growing
- Strategic planning sessions
- Consulting
- Producing assistance
- Mentoring
- Advice
- Rigging
- Filming
- Creative support on shows
- Teaching
- Skills sharing and exchange
- Building maintenance — cleaning and caretaking
- Catering and food
- Facilitation
- Industry research
- Free tickets to shows
- Copywriting
- Editing and grant feedback
- Dramaturgical support
- Design support
- Prop and costume making

[7] Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, 2017.

Chapter 5

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

This section reports on the impact of COVID-19 and may be confronting for some readers.

The impact of COVID-19 has been monumental in the performing arts sector. Even with a shift toward “living with COVID” in 2022, it continues to severely impact independents across the country.

Impact on Creative Practice

We asked respondents to report in their own words the impact of COVID-19 on their practice in 2021 and 2022. Our text analysis produced the following findings (see Figure 5.1).

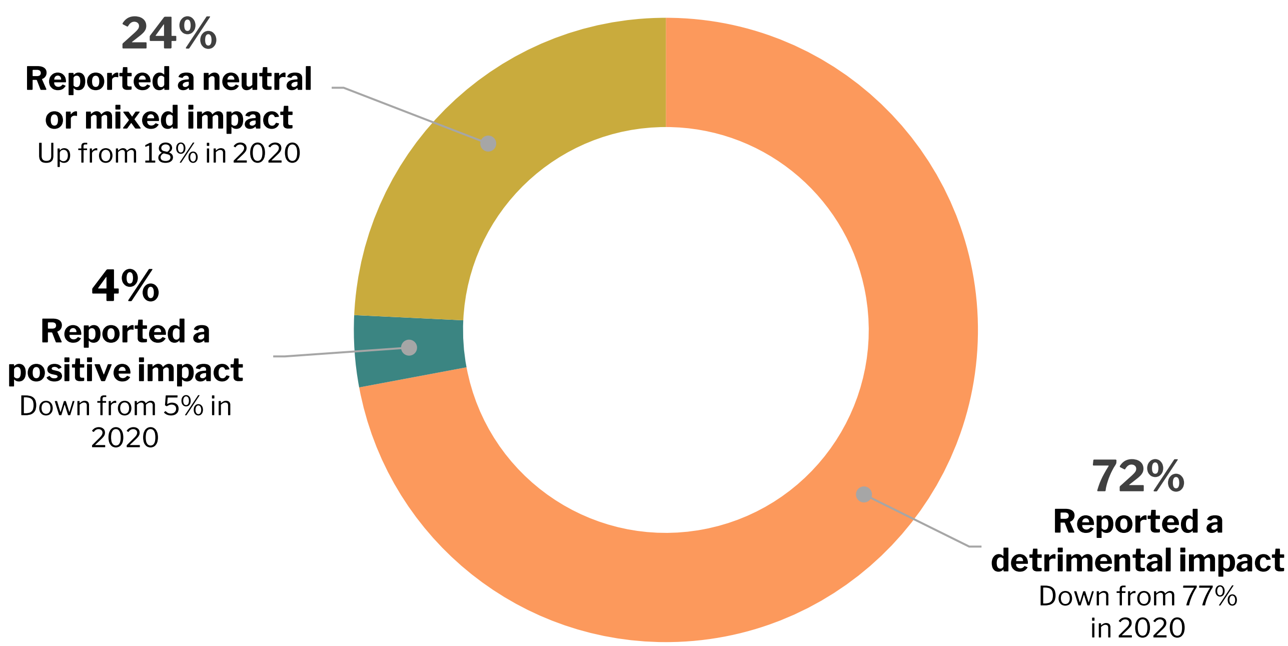

Figure 5.1: *COVID-19 impact on creative practice*

Three years into the pandemic, the disruption to creative practice continues and there is a sense of weariness amongst respondents. Below are some of main sentiments reported.

Detrimental

- loss of momentum
- low motivation/morale
- fatigue
- a sense that there is no end in sight
- difficulties around getting workers across borders for projects
- Fewer opportunities to network and collaborate, especially for emerging practitioners

- loss of employment
- spaces were less available
- poor mental health
- low audience numbers
- international touring halted
- constant rescheduling
- increased administrative burden
- backlog of work and acquittals
- fewer programming opportunities - Presenters playing catch up means fewer opportunities for independent work to be programmed
- fear of getting COVID-19
- inability to plan ahead
- lack of budget for understudies and postponements
- having to take on multiple roles on projects when collaborators are isolating
- more competition for grants and funding
- increased risk of injury for dancers and physical theatre performers, due to less regular training and lead times into performance periods.

Neutral

- more online training and digital forms
- relocating to a different state or to a regional area
- no huge impact on practice.

Positive

- more income from non-arts work, leading to a more stable financial situation
- stronger sense of local community
- slowing down facilitated a creative practice
- pivoting to other or additional focus areas.

“[Postponements] mean you get paid once but need to work two production periods.’

“Many [projects] had timelines that blew out or needed to be rescheduled. This resulted in financial impacts such as needing to arrange and pay for extra childcare, extra travel and accommodation as well as meals and other personal costs associated with the work.’

“Projects are frequently rescheduled within the same period (all at once when lockdown finishes) - meaning artists have to drop out of multiple projects and lose income. Perhaps there is a way that artists could be paid

a fee/partial fee for projects they are involved in that are rescheduled due to Covid reasons.'

"I was able to attend a lot of online events that would otherwise be inaccessible to me - a single mother living regionally.'

"[The pandemic gave me time] to develop work and think more deeply about the work I was making. [This] made the work a lot better.'

Impact on Other Employment

70% of independents who have other employment lost work due to COVID-19 in 2021 and 2022, down from 83% in 2020.

Three years into the pandemic, indies are three times more likely to work in 'other' non-arts industries compared to before the pandemic (see Figure 3.2).

Unsurprisingly, those with casual and contract/temporary work were more likely to lose work compared to those with part-time or full-time work (Figure 5.2).

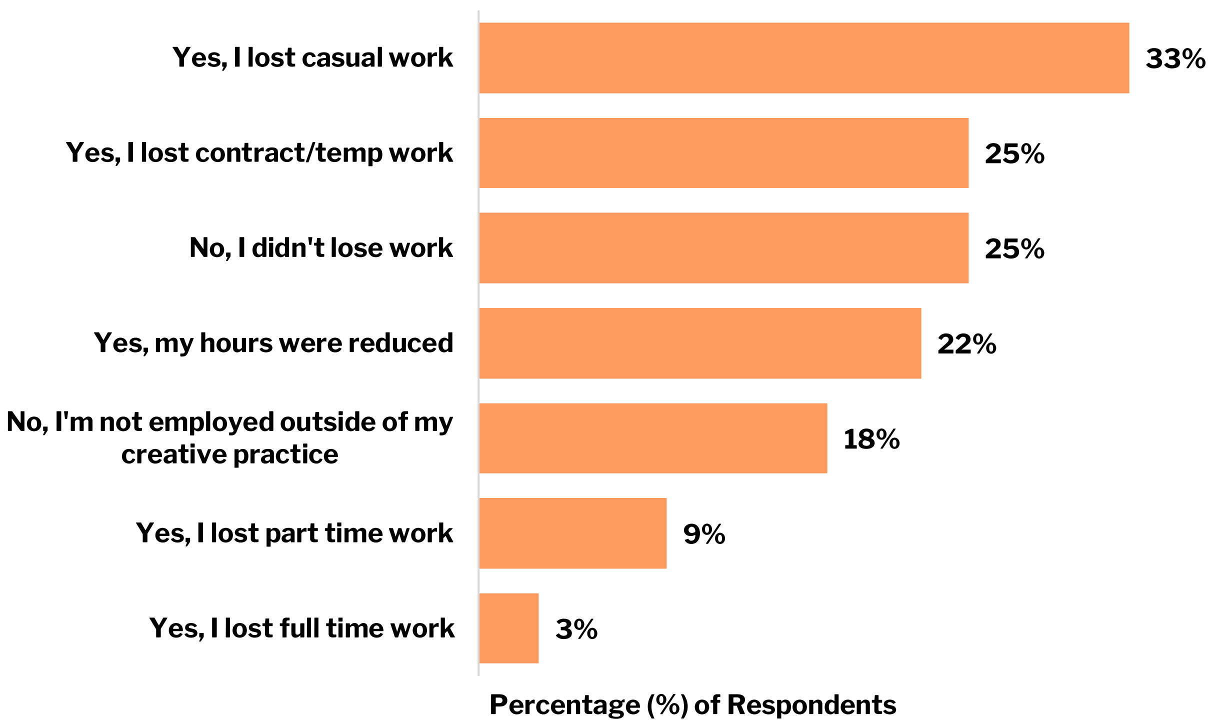

Figure 5.2: *COVID-19 impact on other employment in 2021 and 2022*

Impact of Omicron Waves on Practice & Projects in 2022

We wanted to find out how the 2022 Omicron waves, alongside the removal of most government restrictions, were impacting indies.

Postponements are cited as a leading impact, with almost half the respondents experiencing postponements (see Figure 5.3). This is arguably more detrimental than cancellations, with a recurrent sentiment of having to do double the work for the same amount of money.

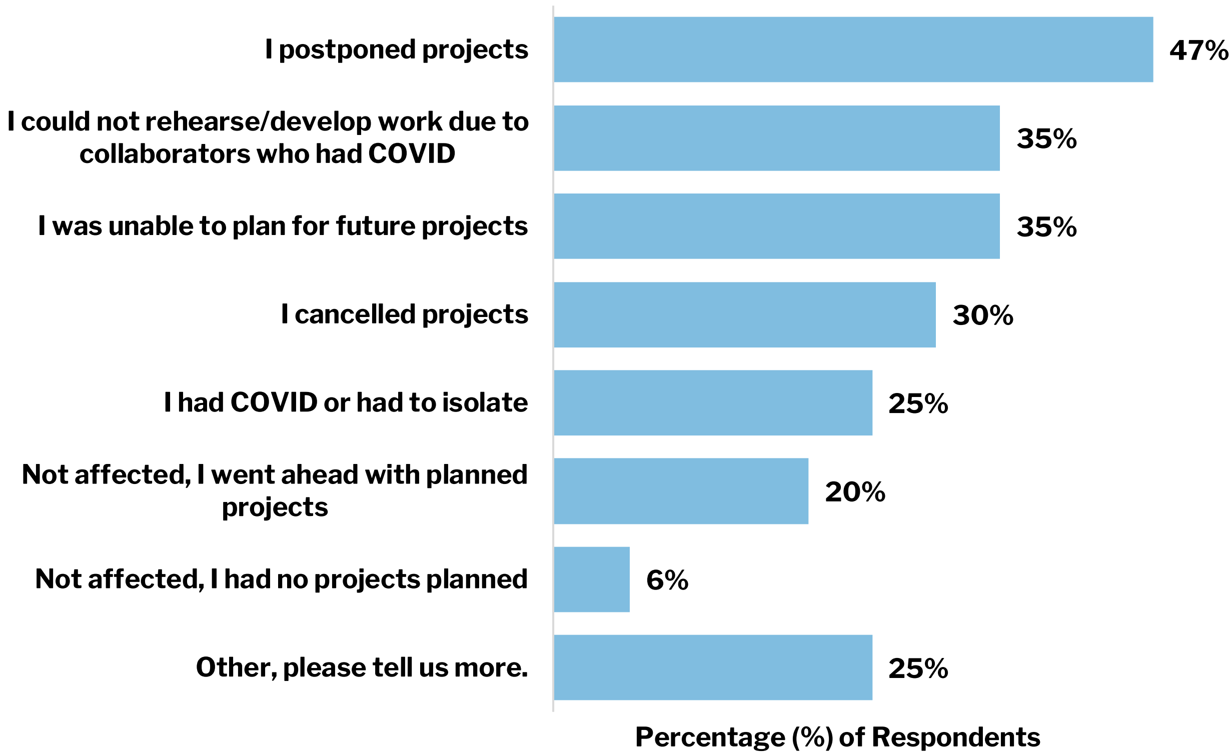

Figure 5.3: *Impact of COVID-19 Omicron waves on projects in 2022*

Many respondents who selected 'Other' elaborated on their specific circumstances. Some respondents experienced cancellations or postponements but did not have a say in the decision as contractors. 'Other' factors not in the above list include:

- disconnection and alienation from the arts community
- extra administrative burdens
- more competition for grants and funding
- fatigue, anxiety and poor mental health
- detrimental impact on creative outcome/ artistic quality
- lack of budget for understudies and contingencies
- poor ticket sales.

“This is the worst phase of the pandemic from my perspective.’

“All current policy settings point to a return to a 'business as usual' posture; restrictions are increasingly being dismantled while actual case numbers remain high. This creates a perverse situation where postponements/cancellations are seen as individual rather than systemic. [However], the risk to project completions from COVID and other health related issues amongst collaborators is still very high.’

“A reschedule does not make up the income, it still takes away income from future income.’

“It was very difficult to hold our production team and cast together with new people sick every day… Our remaining team members had to take on multiple roles & as director I also had to step into understudy role… We had to shift resources around to accommodate rehearsing and paying for a local understudy (with no additional fee for this).’

Decision-Making & Risk Management

Even with the gradual lifting of government restrictions and mandates in 2022, independents continue to face multiple pressures and are still required to plan for unexpected scenarios. We wanted to understand how independents juggle competing risk factors to make decisions around projects, and how our independent sector is navigating the ‘new normal’.

For those who **postponed or cancelled** projects, the leading reason was to prioritise the health of artists/workers/participants involved (see Figure 5.4). In the absence of mandates, independents put it on themselves to practice social responsibility.

‘Other’ reasons to cancel/postpone included:

- interstate travel restrictions making it hard to rehearse
- international travel restrictions preventing tours
- mental health
- decisions made by others, including presenters and venues postponing programmed works.

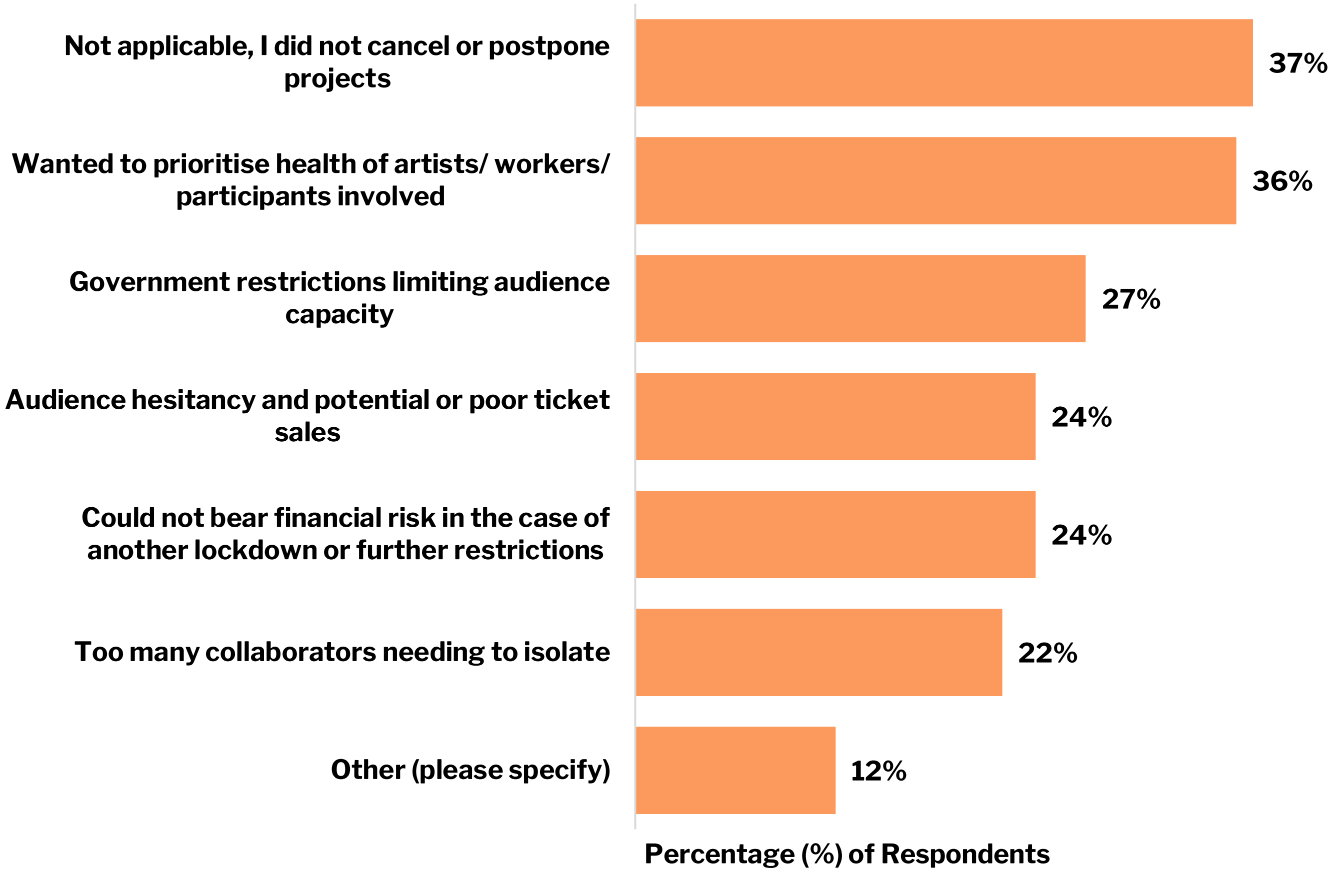

Figure 5.4: *Factors influencing cancellations and postponements*

The top three reasons for **going ahead** shows that independents are driven by financial and time pressures (had invested too much time and money), a sense of social responsibility toward others (wanting collaborators to be paid) and mental health reasons (the need for closure) (see Figure 5.5). Contractual obligations with various parties did not feature as top reasons for going ahead.

Other reasons cited for proceeding:

- not feasible to postpone due to other upcoming work
- needing to work for the sake of mental health, to get used to the new normal
- project had pivoted to digital form
- project pivoted to outdoor location with social distancing.

Some respondents commented that they proceeded because of contractual obligations, despite feeling unsafe. Others feared damaging relationships with arts organisations and collaborators, thereby jeopardising future work opportunities.

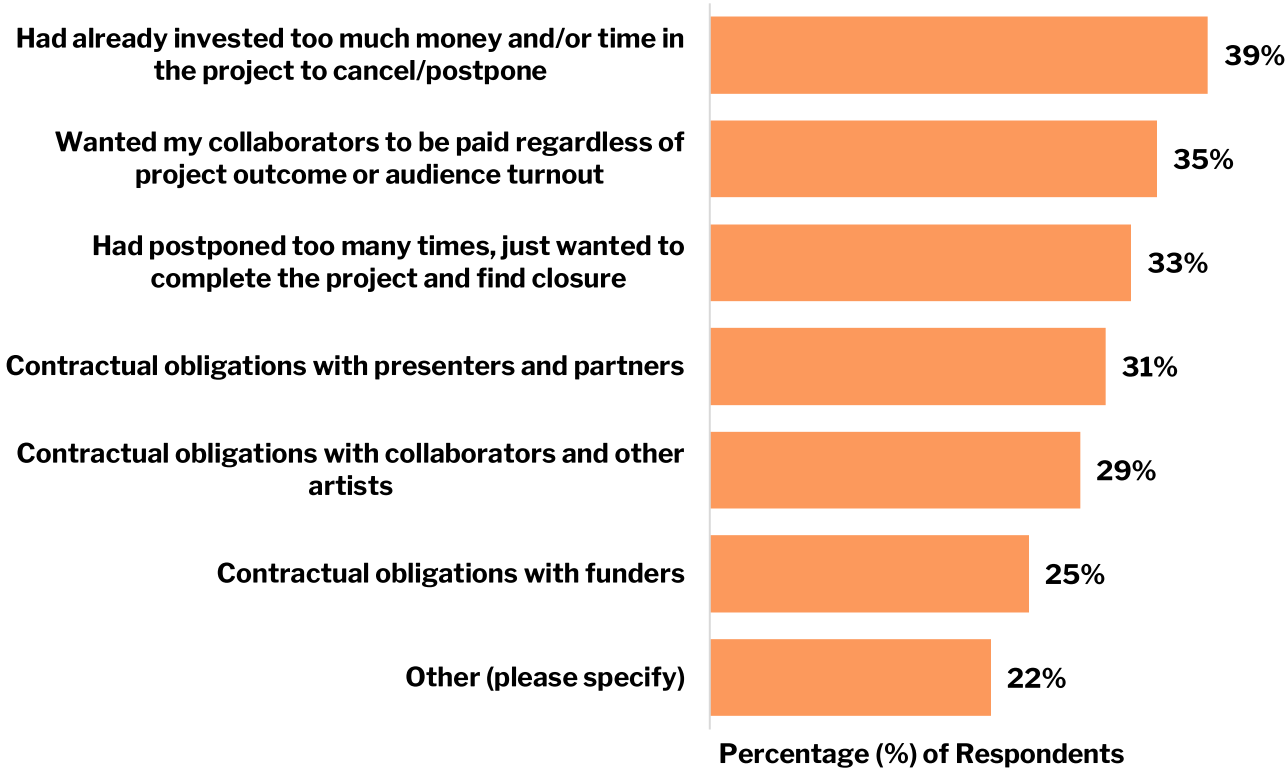

Figure 5.5: *Reasons respondents gave for proceeding with projects*

Navigating an Uncertain Future Impacted by COVID-19

We asked respondents how independents can be better supported to navigate an uncertain future impacted by COVID-19 (see Figure 5.6).

The top 3 ways indies want to be supported is consistent with data gathered through other questions in this survey.

'Crisis Funding/Covid Support Funding' is consistent with heavy reliance on government support as an income source (see Figure 4.2). The need for 'Insurance for cancellations and postponements that are applicable and accessible' corroborates the low rates of applications to past and existing insurance schemes (see page 41), which are perceived as ineffective in addressing financial risks. The need for 'Greater flexibility in contracts, acquittals and variations' is similarly echoed in the qualitative responses to questions around negotiations with other parties (see page 42). Related to this, many respondents wanted support in how to adjust contracts to account for unexpected changes in a project due to COVID-19 illness.

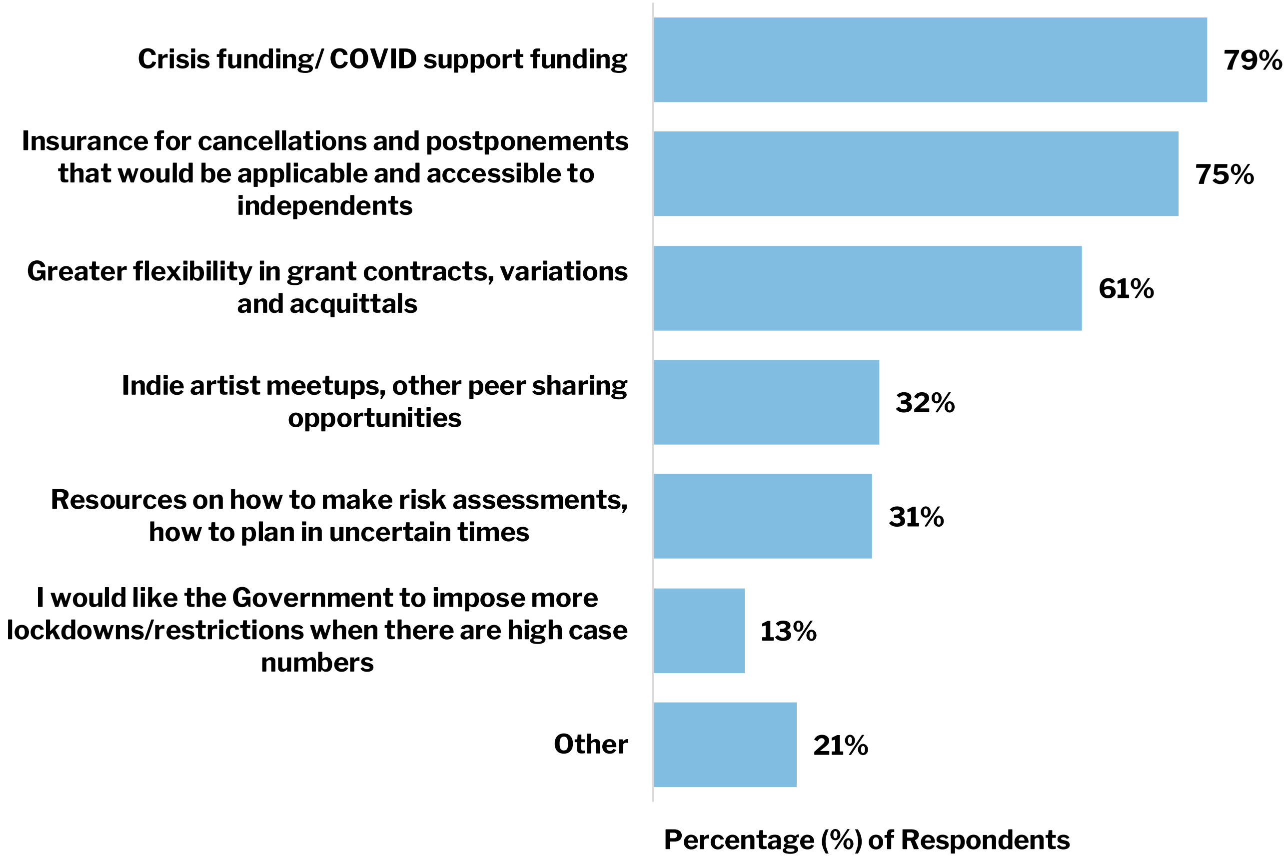

Figure 5.6: *COVID-19 support wanted by respondents*

'Other' included:

- Universal Basic Income
- sick pay scheme for contractors / pandemic leave disaster payment
- sustainable working conditions
- reasonable expectations from other parties involved in projects
- the sector as a whole to have more reasonable expectations of ourselves
- mask mandates in indoor settings.

Insurance Schemes Covering COVID-19

Only 7% of respondents (20 people) applied for insurance schemes that covered COVID-19 cancellations or postponements in 2021 or 2022. Of these 20 that applied, 14 were successful at the time of the survey.

Comparing the insurance schemes across states and territories, the most successful insurance schemes were in Tasmania (14% of Tasmanian respondents applied) and Western Australia (19% of Western Australian respondents applied). No respondents from New South Wales applied for any insurance, and only 6% of Victorian respondents applied.

The insurance schemes applied for were:

- Getting the Show Back on the Road (WA) – now closed
- Jetstar Travel Insurance https://www.jetstartravelinsurance.com.au
- Tasmania's Live Performance Support Program – now closed
- COVID-19 Event Insurance (VIC) Vic Govt insurance in the event of restrictions – till Dec 2022 https://www.vmia.vic.gov.au/event
- Victorian Events Support Package (VIC) - now closed
- Fringe World COVID Relief Fund (WA)
- Superannuation fund income protection (unnamed).

We note that insurance for COVID-19 is a fast-changing environment, and many of the above schemes are no longer applicable with government restrictions (including mandatory isolation) removed as of October 2022. However, COVID-19 related cancellations remain a risk to our sector, and it is still challenging to make future plans.

Negotiations with Funders, Presenters, Companies and Collaborators

More respondents found negotiations with other parties to be easy/very easy (33% - 53%), as opposed to being difficult/very difficult (12% - 16%). However, many commented that this varied widely depending on the project and partners involved.

Many who were contractors or employed by others found negotiations harder when it came to contract variations. Understandably, they had less agency when it came to decisions around postponements and cancellations, but had to suffer income loss.

Some of the challenges faced in negotiations include:

- difficulty in rescheduling due to busy collaborators
- not having money to pay collaborators a postponement fee
- interstate presenters having different experiences of COVID risks and were less understanding
- presenters having uncertainty around budgets
- presenters postponing or restarting projects last minute, or providing short lead times
- unclear or unconsidered contractual clauses
- cancellation policies with no payout.

“The new normal has made everyone more flexible and understanding.’

“Companies and presenters ranged from fabulous, caring, generous, understanding to staunchly uncaring about cancellations.’

“Negotiating new times with artists competing and very full schedules was probably the biggest problem.’

“I am still seeing contracts that specify I won't be paid if I become unwell.’

Income Loss from Omicron Wave(s) in 2022

In just the *first half of 2022* alone, the average income loss per respondent from creative work was $8,594.

Survey responses show 297 independents lost a total of $2,552,351 from creative income in 6 months.

The average income loss per respondent from other work was $2,467.

Financial Impact

The percentage of respondents who feel they are financially worse off has decreased from 49% in 2020 to 36% in 2022 (see Figure 5.8). In addition, more respondents feel financially better off (17%) compared to the 12% 2020. This may be because more independents have moved into stable non-arts work due to COVID-19 (Figure 3.2), or now have other employment outside of their creative practice (Figure 3.1).

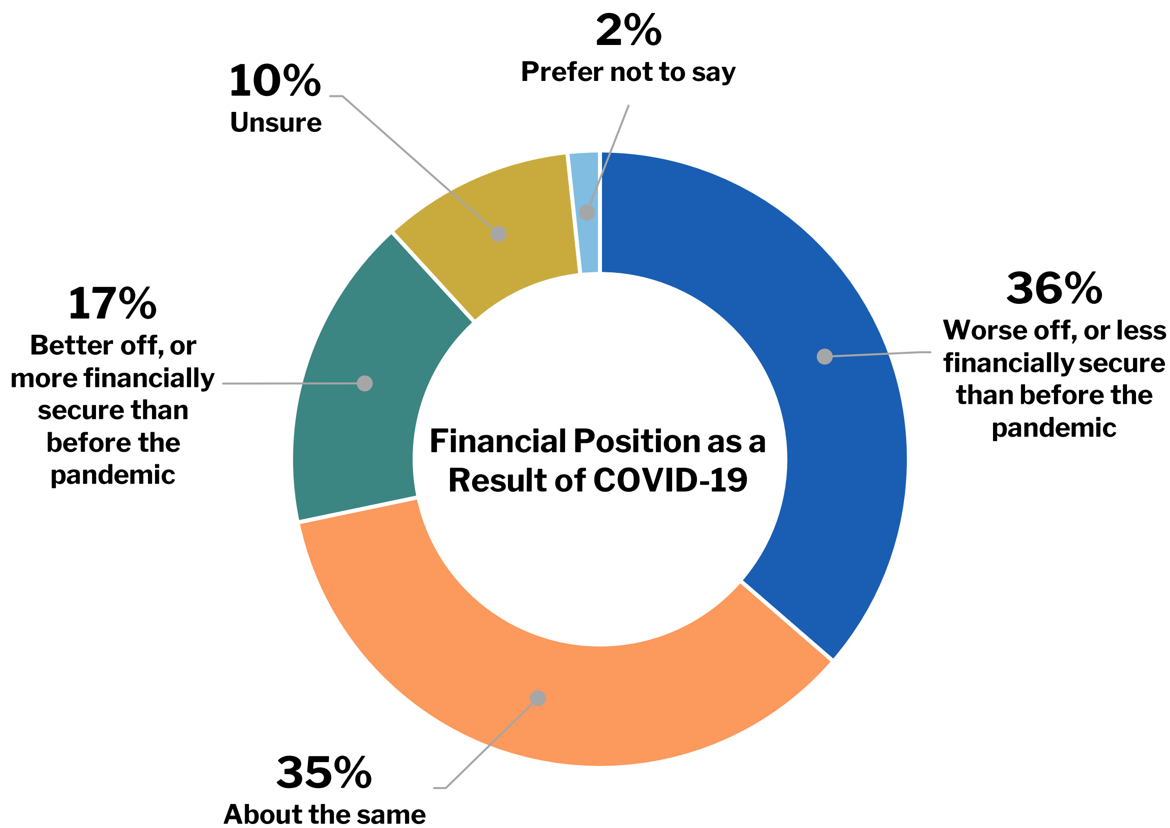

Figure 5.8: *Financial impact on respondents due to COVID-19*

"The pandemic prompted me to get a full-time job in the arts with a stable arts organisation. I'm able to apply my experience of 15 years as an independent artist in a new context... I feel relieved at having a secure full-time income for the first time in my working life."

"I have recently changed from working part-time at a theatre company to working at a larger Government agency. This decision was for my own professional development as well as financial need."

A third of respondents said their financial position remains about the same. A few respondents noted that they were no better or worse off - not in absolute terms – but because the financial precarity of being an independent artist has not changed.

“The pay rates are still low compared to other industries, work is inconsistent and a long-term career continues to be unsustainable. I can't live off my creative practice… This has not changed... The instability of freelance work continues unabated.”

Mental Health

50% of respondents accessed mental health services due to COVID impacts in 2021 and 2022, **up from 30%** in 2020.

How respondents identify has an influence on whether they access mental health services, with disabled and trans/non-binary respondents more likely to access mental health services than those from other groups (see Figure 5.10).

Emerging respondents are also more likely to access mental health services (58% of respondents), compared to mid-career (48%) and established (42%) respondents.

Despite the continued uncertainties and pressures brought about by COVID-19, there is a recurrent sentiment that ‘the show must go on’ – much to the detriment of mental health.

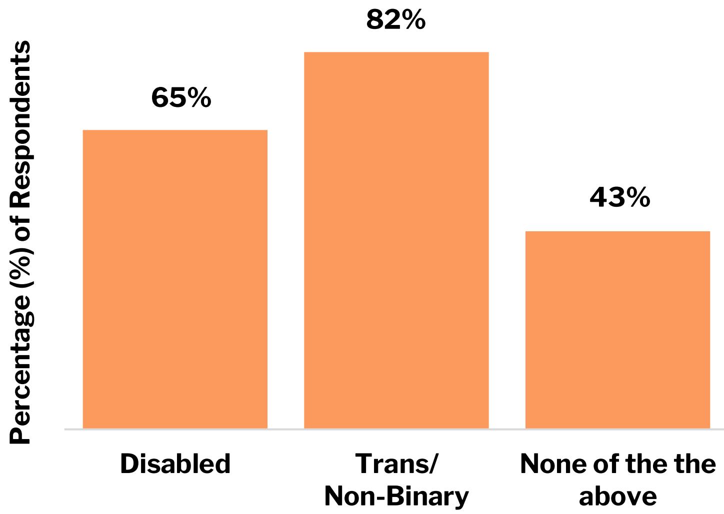

Figure 5.10: *Percentage of respondents who accessed mental health services due to COVID-19 impact*

“We are certainly not "living with COVID", we are suffering with it.’

“It has been massive and it is not over... It feels like the bottom has fallen out of an already leaky boat.’

“The continued uncertainty and people consistently falling to covid and having to reschedule on jobs has made it an incredibly anxiety inducing time.’

“The current attitude is that ‘the show must go on' which is having a negative impact on the psychological health of the industry. Not sure cancellations are the answer, but perhaps we need longer lead times that factor in people needing to step out.’

“I would love to see the arts sector respond to current conditions and general financial insecurity by moving to a slower pace of programming or model of work.’

“Though my mental health seriously suffered, ultimately Covid has yielded an incredibly positive new direction for me.’

Attending In-Person Events

Where it was permitted in 2021 and 2022, almost half the respondents were 'comfortable to a large extent' (32%) or 'excited and keen to go' (15%) to in-person events (see Figure 5.11). These include shows, rehearsals, workshops, meetings, and forums.

6% of Victorian indies "generally did not go to anything", compared to 0% of Western Australian indies.

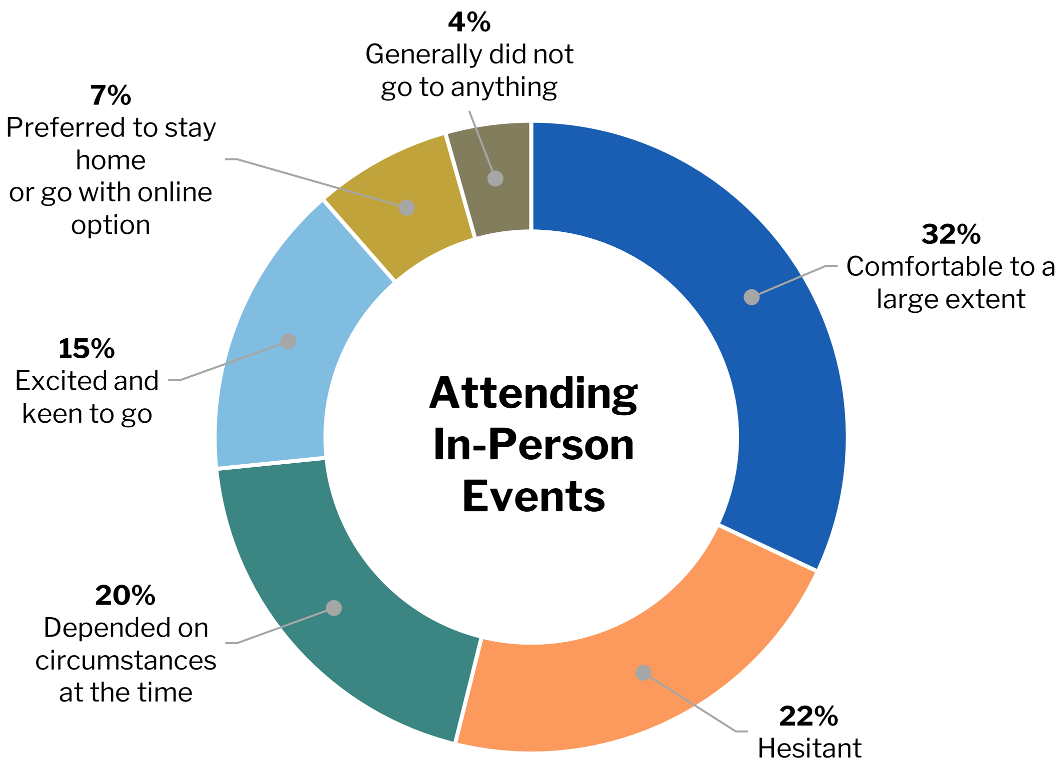

Figure 5.11: *Respondents' willingness to attend in-person events*

Of those who said it 'depended on circumstances at the time', factors influencing their decision were:

- mask wearing
- case numbers
- crowd size
- duration
- ventilation
- whether they and family had been infected
- whether they had an upcoming project
- personal and family health (whether immunocompromised)
- necessity (some work just had to happen in-person).

Attrition Rate

Through TNA's ongoing consultation, we have heard that many creatives are retraining or in the process of changing careers. To find out the rate at which this is happening, we asked respondents if they are currently retraining, planning to retrain, or considering a career change, in which field/profession, and why.

We analysed qualitative responses and grouped them into three categories. Almost half (49%) are considering some kind of career change (see Figure 5.12).

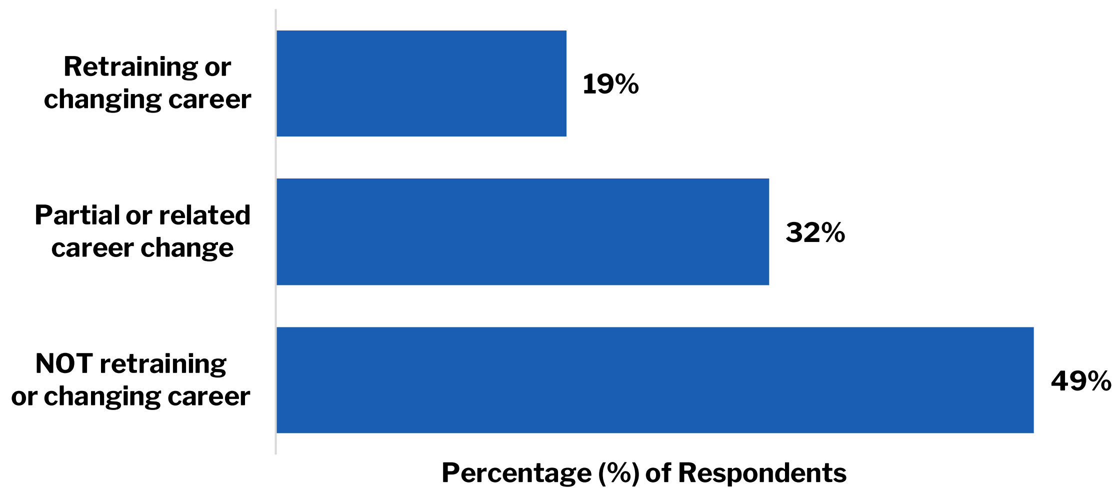

Figure 5.12: *Percentage of respondents retraining or changing careers*

'Related' refers to respondents who are retraining in a related creative field. 'Partial' comprises respondents who are retraining in another profession to supplement their arts income, but who intend to continue practising as a creative in some capacity.

Being mid-career increases one's chances of leaving the profession completely (25%), compared to being emerging (14%) or established (15%). However, 45% of emerging respondents are retraining in a related field or undertaking a partial career change.

I turned to non-arts work to make a living and now, "post COVID", I am struggling to return to arts on a full-time focus.

"I am retraining into the medical administration sector and will not be working in the arts anymore. That is a career of nearly 40 years gone due to the inability to survive financially."

“I am going to retrain as an early childhood educator. The insecurity of being a working artist has really hit me in the last two years - not so much the financial stress (though that’s real) but really the emotional energy required to maintain an output that keeps me securely employed is unsustainable for me.’

“I’m hoping to balance both speech pathology and dance after I have finished my study.’

“The performing arts industry is losing people in droves. The future is pretty grim.’

“I love what I do and I’m staying, rain or shine.’

TNA **OBSERVATIONS**

Rates & Fees

Many independents do not have set fees or established rates for their practice. They also lack confidence in negotiating and setting their own fees for a job.

High levels of expenditure by Deaf or Disabled respondents on health and wellbeing is evident — and does not necessarily lead to higher fees.

The rates provided by respondents shows the underpayment or non-payment of independents.

Looking at *hourly* rates when working on unfunded/minimally funded projects:

- 29% of respondents indicated 'zero'[8].
- 17% indicated a fee lower than the Australian minimum wage of $21.38/hour.
- This equates to 46% of respondents not being paid a legal wage.

This underpayment or non-payment increases when we look at *weekly* rates on unfunded/minimally funded projects:

- 26% of respondents indicated 'zero'[9].
- 53% indicating a fee lower than the Australian minimum wage of $812.60/week.
- This equates to 79% of respondents not receiving a legal weekly rate when working on unfunded/minimally funded projects.

On these projects independents often receive a fee per person – and yet fulfill multiple roles. Our industry is relying on a huge amount of unpaid labour from independents.

Independents receive $1,316.76 as an average weekly wage when working for an established organisation. For comparison, the Australian full-time adult average weekly earnings increased to $1,769.80 in May 2022.[10] We must also keep in mind that the expenditure required to continue practising between projects is not covered.

In publishing these rates, TNA advocates for fairer and more equitable remuneration for arts work. Understanding the constant push and pull of lean arts budgets, we encourage those setting rates to think not only of short-term outcomes but how they can enable independent practitioners to have more sustainable careers.

[8] Respondents' comments typically stated that 'zero' means no payment, profit-share, or unsure what to put as the amount is insignificant. TNA Independent Survey, 2022.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Average Weekly Earnings Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022.

Access

Access costs look different for every person and include but are not limited to disability access costs, interpreters, transport costs, and childcare costs. Respondents who incur such costs report that they often have to pay for these out of their professional fee, inadvertently taking a pay cut.

TNA recommends that organisations make it policy to budget for access, transport and childcare, and any costs that may be a barrier to practising as an independent. Offering payment or reimbursements for such costs should be included in agreements/contracts. Independent creatives should also include these costs in project budgets.

We hope that this will become common practice as we continue to advocate for a more equitable sector.

Superannuation

With such low rates of pay, is it not surprising that only 33% of independents make their own contributions to their superannuation, even though 68% are “Lead Creatives” and we assume are largely self-employed. Self-employed independents working on their own projects are not required to make contributions to their own superannuation, but it is an important consideration for a financially secure future.

We recommend that independents who do not know or do not have superannuation seek financial advice to understand contributions and obligations and how this can improve their future financial outlook. It is now a legal requirement to pay superannuation on top of all contracts regardless of amount. We hope that this is a move toward a more sustainable future for independents.

Panels & Boards

With about half the respondents on paid panels and serving on boards, the amount of time that independent creatives spend giving back to the sector is noteworthy. TNA recommends that organisations and funding bodies remunerate independent panel members more realistically, given the amount of work required to assess applications.

We also recommend that organisations consider paying independents on their Boards a sitting fee. TNA now pays an honorarium to independent board members, and our Independent Board Member Sitting Fee Policy outlines how we go about this.

COVID-19

Three years in, the initial energy around rebuilding a more sustainable sector, or ‘building back better’, seems to have diminished in the wake of a long-drawn pandemic. Relieved by the removal of government restrictions, many in our sector are keen to just return to a new normal, scrambling to deliver postponed projects, and restarting shows and touring. A few respondents have described this as disappointing, with one stating:

> *“The promise of an arts reset was a much-vaunted topic of discussion in early - mid 2020. This idea has slipped away from the dialogue between organisations, funders and artists. I think it's a great shame, and an indication of just how tentative real conversations are. I'd like to see this topic on the table. Instead of the widespread rekindling of unsustainable relationships and structures.”*

Meanwhile, the pandemic continues to present the sector with many challenges. The wide range of responses about the impact shows the impossibility of separating art practice, other work, finances, and life.

The increasing hours of work done for lower or no pay, largely a result of postponements and delivering a backlog of projects, is clear from many respondents’ comments. Similarly fraught is the lack of budget for understudies or contingencies, resulting in creatives taking on multiple roles last minute - to the detriment of their mental health and artistic outcomes.

Mental Health

There is a significant increase in respondents accessing mental health services in 2021 and 2022. This is consistent with the Australia Council’s 2022 COVID Impact report, which also notes that the most affected are early career artists, freelancers, and women, many of whom were excluded from government support such as JobKeeper. Women not only faced the difficulties of COVID-19 and related lockdowns, but also disproportionately faced the challenge of increased care responsibilities for elderly parents and children, and the distractions of working from home during lockdown.[11]

[11] Impacts of COVID-19 on the Cultural and Creative Industries, Australia Council, 2022.

The Future

There is a sense of weariness as independent creatives continue to wade through unrelenting COVID-19 related pressures.

Anecdotal reports of independent creatives leaving the industry is consistent with our findings in this survey, with half the respondents undertaking or seriously considering some form of career change.

Emerging creatives and practitioners, particularly those studying or graduating since 2020, are feeling lost – with limited opportunities to practise or network during the pandemic.

On a brighter note, we look forward to a National Cultural Policy, which may assist in providing a united vision for and investment in our sector.

TNA invites arts organisations, companies, and festivals, as well as local, state, and federal funding bodies and governments to work with the sector to address the imbalances and inequities highlighted by this report. Independent artists are an essential part of a healthier, safer, and more relevant Australian performing arts sector.

Our collective response in the coming years will shape the cultural landscape and determine the legacy we leave for a future generation of artists and creatives.

Theatre Network Australia
THIS IS HOW WE DO IT 2022 REPORT

Prepared by:
Yuhui Ng-Rodriguez, Manager, Sector Development and Membership
and the TNA team

October 2022

Contact us:
info@tna.org.au
tna.org.au
(03) 9947 1015
G5 / 152 Sturt Street, Southbank VIC 3006