

# Independent Dance Sector Report

## A National Scan of the Independent Dance Sector in Australia Executive Summary

By Carl Sciberras, Joshua Lowe, and Frankie Snowdon

### Introduction

Co-authors Carl Sciberras, Joshua Lowe, and Frankie Snowdon created this report (published April 2024) after identifying a perceived need for improved support and working conditions for Independent Dance Artists (Independents). All three authors have a background in independent dance, and all now co-lead organisations in the sector. The report aims to clearly identify the key issues for Independents, provide practical recommendations to address some of these issues, and act as a tool to prompt action within the sector.

### Definitions

For the purpose of this report, the 'dance sector' is defined as: National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF) dance companies; Small-to-medium dance companies; Organisations who support the development and/or production of subsidised dance works, 'choreographic centres,' etc.; Youth dance companies; Presenters of dance; Organisations who provide resources to, bridge gaps between, advocate for and/or add value or efficiency to the production and/or mobilising of dance works; and Independents. For the purpose of this work the dance sector does *not* include: Private dance schools; Dance in secondary education; Commercial dance; and Tertiary dance training.

Independents are defined as comprised of two distinct subgroups, which are: Sole trader independent choreographers who are contracted and/or casually employed by the 'dance sector', and/or contract and/or casually employ gigging dancers; and sole trader gigging dancers who are contracted and/or are casually employed by the 'dance sector' and/or sole trader independent choreographers.

### Methodology

This report has been supported through the Creative Australia Leadership Program Alumni fund. Key steps to developing this report included:

- A national survey with responses from 114 Independents and a review of the data.
- A 2.5 day intensive where the co-authors met in person, which included interviews with four invited Independents, and an online meeting for feedback on early findings and recommendations from 30 of the survey respondents.
- Online meetings with seven dance organisations for feedback and input to the draft report.
- Ongoing consultation with Creative Australia staff.

The report also outlines the limitations (things that the data from this report does not represent) and exclusions (identified issues and areas of work that are outside the scope and resourcing of this report).

## Key Issues

The report identifies 16 key issues in areas of funding and investment, workload, pay and conditions, available resources, connections and networks, inefficient systems and programs, and a lack of understanding and transparency in key areas of the sector.

## Recommendations

### Short-term

1. A charter be developed as a tool for Independents and organisations to create better and more informed employment and contracting processes.
2. A centralised, digital, accessible, up-to-date, and regularly maintained resource bank where Independents can locate the code and practical samples and templates that are relevant to their work, such as sample grant applications, agreements, invoicing templates, marketing guides, pitch documents, etc.
3. A ubiquitous, standardised invoicing template, shared amongst Independents to identify discounted services/labour. Embraced by organisations, it tracks the amount of underpaid work Independents are doing in the sector.
4. A coordinated program to provide greater access to training and workforce maintenance for gigging dancers.
5. The establishment of a professional development loading for contracted independent choreographers for independent choreographers to engage in their own self-guided professional and skills development in between projects.
6. Access for Independents nationally to bespoke advisory services, such as the [Business Connect](#) service in NSW, with specialist advisors who can provide artists with tailored and specific feedback, advice, and support.
7. That Creative Australia reinstate refreshed iterations of ArtStart and JUMP Mentorship programs to dedicate bespoke funding to emerging artists.
8. A series of gatherings occur to enable Independents and to find and maintain community and connect them with the broader sector, including organisations. Local gatherings should take place before a national gathering.

### Mid-to-long-term

9. More interorganisational collaborations to build, strengthen and/or streamline the development and/or presentation of independent works.
10. Improving and sharing of processes across the sector, including sharing some data (biographies of artists, superannuation details, etc., and/or creating a centralised updatable database shared across organisations.
11. Greater cross-sector coordination of opportunities, such as residencies to identify gaps to fill and remove/adjust opportunities that are not fit-for-purpose.
12. Dedicated investment and cross-sector collaboration to identify pathways for Independents to progress and/or transition.
13. Cross-sector collaboration to develop and grow private investment in the sector, dedicated to the development of Independent work.
14. Interorganisational marketing and audience development strategies, developed with presenters, to streamline, amplify and coordinate a stronger dance brand.
15. Strategic touring initiatives that develop and sustain touring routes for Independent work.

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