

Submission to the Modern Awards Review 2023-2024

4 December 2023

Submitted on behalf of the research team leading the ARC Linkage Project [*Visual Arts Work: sustainable strategies for the Australian visual arts and craft sector*](#) (LP200100054), Professor Grace McQuilten, Associate Professor Marnie Badham, and Chloë Powell (RMIT University) and Professor Kate MacNeill and Associate Professor Jenny Lye (The University of Melbourne).

The *Visual Arts Work* research project aims to strengthen the sustainability of the visual arts and craft sector. In a context where artists' incomes are low and falling, commercial galleries are financially vulnerable, and public galleries face funding challenges, this project addresses barriers to the sector's economic health and the challenge of improving artists' and arts workers' incomes.

While the value of art 'work' has typically been understood in economic terms, we also recognise the need for greater insight into the social, cultural, and political value created and values found in the negotiations and mediation of art to the public. Our approach recognises the diversity and hybridity of visual arts and craft work to include digitisation, internationalisation, community based and intersectoral partnerships.

Summary

Within the arts and culture sector, the visual arts and craft face chronic issues of precarity, underpayment, a heavy reliance on unpaid labour, and uneven working conditions.

A standalone Award for the visual arts and craft sector is therefore needed. Unlike those working in the performing arts, who are covered by a specific Award and Union representation by the Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance (MEAA), there is no comprehensive award protection for visual arts and craft artists and arts workers.

Existing coverage through Awards such as the 'Amusement, Events and Recreation' and 'Miscellaneous' Awards are insufficient and don't address the unique and hybrid nature of the work of visual artists and craft artists. Likewise, arts workers in this sector, such as curators, gallery assistants, arts educators, technicians, and public programmers, are not adequately recognised in existing Awards. Their work requires specialist skills and knowledge applied in specific workplace settings, which differs from those set out in Awards such as the 'Local Government Industry Award' or 'Professional Employees Award.'

Background

Our submission draws on a range of research from the *Visual Arts Work* research project, including a survey on workers in the Australian visual arts sector that our team undertook in 2022, which is the largest academic survey specific to the visual arts sector to date. It collected and analysed data on sources of income and modes of work and employment over two separate financial years: 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 and had over 700 respondents.

The prevalence of people working in multiple jobs both within and outside of the visual arts and craft sector is well known. A central purpose for undertaking this survey was to better understand the

circumstances contributing to the hybridity of artists and arts workers' careers and to provide practical recommendations for policy intervention.

A number of the issues uncovered in our research could be addressed by an Award developed specifically for the visual arts and craft sector. Our recommendations, listed at the end of this submission, respond to these. We first provide findings from our research that inform our recommendations.

While noting that visual art and craft artists and arts workers face similar challenges, there are also circumstances that are unique to each cohort. In particular, terms of employment differ greatly for artists compared to arts workers. As such, we list findings for each group separately, as context for our recommendations.

Artists

- The average income from an art practice in 2020/21 was \$11,321 with significant gender disparities: male artists reported an average income from their practice of \$22,906, female artists of \$8,507 and non-binary artists \$10,157.
- Not only do male artists earn more from their art practice than female artists, its proportionately even more when accounting for the hours spent at their practice.
- A better measure is the median income which moderates the impact of the outliers at the higher end. On this measure the gender gap is reduced somewhat but is still significant with the median income for male artists being \$4,437 and for female artists \$2,671, 60% of the male artists' median income.
- Only 30% of respondents spent 100% of their working time as an artist.
- 60.7% of those who identified primarily as visual or craft artists received at least some form of income from outside the visual arts and crafts sector, many from other employment, but also including private income and family support.
- 35% of artists also have employment in the non-arts sector, with over half working either in a casual or fixed term appointment or are self-employed.

Gender Composition of Visual Artists and Craft Artists

The gender composition of the sample is consistent with other surveys in that the majority of respondents identify as female, however this majority is more significant in our sample than in a number of other surveys. Our sample comprises 20.2 % male, 73.5 % female, 3.1% non-binary and 3.2% who either did not respond or identified another category. One explanation for this variation is that our survey did not impose a definition of an artist in terms of eligibility to participate in the survey, instead allowing anyone who identified as a visual or craft artist to participate. Given the occupational categories in the Census are determined by the main job undertaken in the week prior to the Census, this may decrease the number of female artists who are included in the four-digit occupational category. Similarly, Throsby and Petetskaya¹ require respondents to be professional practicing artists, again failing to capture the full range of those engaged in artistic activity. The eligibility for and composition of our sample has more in common with the ABS's *Participation in Selected Cultural Activities* survey, which contains no requirement that respondents are engaged in an arts practice as their *main job* but asks of the whole population whether they are engaged in a cultural activity that generates income in any way. In the 2017-18 survey, women made up 69% of those who participated in visual arts activities (such as painting, drawing and sculpture) and 77% of those engaged in craft activities. This is consistent with proportions of our survey in which 75% of respondents identified as female.

¹ Throsby, D. and Petetskaya, K. (2017). *Making Art Work: An economic study of professional artists in Australia*. 12 November 2017. Sydney, Australian Council for the Arts and Macquarie University.

Incomes, hours and job security

As previously noted, the gendered experience of visual artists and craft practitioners runs through the survey data. The average annual income from an art practice diverges also according to gender, with male artists earning on average \$22,906 in 2020/21, and female artists earning an average of \$8,507, 37% of the male artists' average income. A better measure is the median income which moderates the impact of the outliers at the higher end. On this measure the gender gap is reduced somewhat but is still significant with the median income for male artists being \$4,437 and for female artists \$2,671, 60% of the male artists' median income.

The average hours worked per week on an art practice is 38 hours for males and 29 hours for female artists, roughly 75%. In other words, female artists spend around 75% of the time male artists spend on their practice yet receive 37% of the income that male artists receive. To account for the additional hours spent on average by male artists in their art practice, we approximate an hourly income for male and female artists. Assuming the weekly hours identified are worked over a period of 46 weeks of the year: 1,748 hours annually for male artists and 1,334 hours annually for female artists, the gender gap is still considerable. This produces a notional hourly rate from their art practice of \$13.10 for male artists and \$6.40 for female artists, 50% of the mean hourly rate for male artists.

The gender gap in incomes in the visual arts is likely to arise through a number of different factors: the average age of women artists is less than that of men and many may be confined to an earlier career stage, their earnings are likely to reflect the price differentials in the market for art produced by male and female artists, female artists commit less hours to their practice than do male artists.

A key to understanding the financial circumstances of visual artists and craft practitioners is the hybridity of their work: the majority rely on multiple sources of income. 60.7% of those who identified primarily as visual or craft artists received at least some form of income from outside the visual arts and crafts sector, many from other employment, but also including private income and family support. For some this outside work is the only way that they can support their art practice. As one respondent said:

It is difficult to practice as a visual artist consistently and regularly as I need to work in a job outside the arts sector in order to maintain basic living expenses.

Those visual art and craft artists who are engaged in arts work in the broader visual arts and craft sector will likely receive an income that is significantly below the average of professionals in the workforce. The nature of this additional source of income will play a significant role in determining the sustainability of a career in the visual arts and crafts sector. Visual arts and craft professionals have relatively high levels of education: 62.5% have a relevant undergraduate qualification and 35% postgraduate qualification. At first this might suggest that their employment as arts workers would be relatively well paid. Indeed, of the 40% of respondents who undertook work as an arts worker, many worked as arts educators (50.5% of arts workers) and arts professionals (35.4%). However, as outlined in the section on arts workers below, the income generated through this work is relatively low, likely due to occupying part-time and or short-term contract positions, and despite high levels of education among arts workers, salaries in the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector, and the arts and cultural sector more generally, are not high.

For the majority of those also employed in the arts and cultural sector, and beyond, this employment was most likely to be part-time or casual. This can lead to further insecurity. While income from non-arts related work enables some artists to maintain their practice, it also takes time away from their creative work. Put more plainly by one respondent:

There is no financial security as an artist that is why nearly every artist in Australia has an alternate income stream.

Expectation of gratitude

Many respondents noted the expectation within the sector that artists do not get paid for many activities related to an arts practice. As one participant said:

The expectation that as an artist you will not only work for free, but you will pay a gallery to exhibit there.

Another noted that much of their work was unseen and therefore undervalued and/or underpaid:

The nature of the work is that it is based on commission, sales or merchandising of art works. This is one aspect of the work of an artist, but you also must have time to create the work, and this time for the most part is unpaid work.

As was expected, a large amount of work is undertaken on an unpaid basis with 46% of respondents participating in unpaid work, with little variation between levels of participation by way of gender identification. Variation does exist in relation to the number of hours committed per month to unpaid work with male artists estimating an average of 20 hours per month, female artists 26.7 hours and non-binary artists 28.9 hours. The highest number of hours on average is devoted to self-managed projects, which may be unfunded work, or work involved in obtaining grants, or career management more generally. A higher number of hours on a weekly basis is devoted to artist-run initiatives on the part of non-binary respondents, and male artists contribute more hours on average to participation in Boards than do female artists.

Arts Workers

- There is a clear trend of underemployment for arts workers.
- Arts workers are largely underpaid, earning significantly less than other working professionals, with an average annual income of \$51,196 from their arts work, compared to \$92,029 for the general population.²
- Arts workers tend to be around the same age as the working population as a whole and predominantly female.
- There is a significant issue of unpaid work in the visual arts and craft sectors, as both volunteer time and additional work within one's role often going unpaid.
- At 23.3%, the gender pay gap for female arts workers is much higher than Australia's gender pay gap of 13.3%.

Low incomes across the visual arts and craft sector

Arts workers are highly qualified yet earn significantly less than other professionals. The impact on their current and future financial security and sense of professional worth was a consistent theme throughout respondents' comments:

"As an experienced worker, my salary should represent my level of expertise."

² The definition of "professional worker" is based on the occupational definition outlined by The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), available on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/how-anzsco-works>

“The money is atrocious. I've been on \$70k a year for the last ten+ years, despite changing my jobs multiple times and gaining extensive new skills and experience in this time. I'm single, live alone, don't have any financial support elsewhere—if I stay working in the arts, I am literally facing homelessness in my old age. It has to change.”

“Having enough money to get by—even as an arts worker who works 4 days a week, my income isn't enough to meet my day-to-day living costs.”

“There is no financial security as an artist or an arts worker. I think about giving up and walking away every few months.”

“Mental health for arts workers is rock bottom, people are leaving the sector for an improved basic wage, and educational offerings continue to shrink.”

Endemic reliance on unpaid labour

A high percentage of arts workers (61.5%) reported participating in unpaid work in the arts sector, including volunteering on boards, in artist-run initiatives, on self-managed projects, in family arts-related business, and mentoring. This work generally contributes to the overall strength and progression of the sector, as noted in one comment by a respondent who reported: “providing guidance and consultation to other projects of friends who run ARI's etc.” as their regular form of unpaid work. Early career arts workers in particular reported spending an average of 11 hours per month on self-managed projects, potentially indicating that they are contributing unpaid labour to projects with the aim of developing their experience and skillset.

This highlights the sector's reliance on unpaid labour, both in the form of volunteer contributions to organisations as well as the expectation of those already employed to undertake more work within their role than they are paid for.

“Underpayment and no payment across the sector (especially for public programs), and lack of Super.”

“Insecure work and LOW salaries despite the hours of work contributed.”

“Arts workers are paid below standard incomes despite being expected to do the work of at least three people.”

Overall, this indicates that outcomes for visual and craft arts organisations are largely delivered by staff who are underpaid, overworked, insecurely employed, and feel pressure to contribute unpaid labour in the interests of the success of their employer. Artist-run initiatives and independent arts projects are also supported by arts workers giving their time and expertise for little or no pay. Continued reliance on these circumstances risks significant burnout of staff and associated loss of sector knowledge and capacity if these employees leave the arts industry in favour of secure, better paid work elsewhere.

Gender segmentation and gender pay gap

There is a significant gender pay gap of 23.3% for female arts workers, which is much higher than Australia's gender pay gap of 13.3%³. This is only partly accounted for by career stage, as male arts workers were only slightly more likely to report being at an established career stage, therefore earning a higher income (37%) than female arts workers (32%).

When asked to provide the main reason for wanting additional paid hours of employment, both male and female respondents said it was to increase their income and/or better cover the costs of living.

³ Reference: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/pay-and-gender/gender-pay-gap-data>

Female respondents also noted the need to support their families, and that more work in the arts might enable them to develop their career and to continue working in the sector. Additional paid hours as a form of recognition of their unpaid work was noted by both males and females.

The lack of a reliable and adequate income was also referenced as a barrier to financial and social insecurity by women:

“Very hard to have job security, always short contracts, hard to get a bank loan with only short contracts. I have children so that makes it extra hard to plan with the job insecurity.”

Although there are a significantly higher number of female arts workers in our sample, there are slightly fewer females than males with dependents (30% female versus 37% male). This may suggest that female arts workers with dependents face barriers returning to work after having children. When asked why they were self-employed, for example, one respondent noted they were “laid off due to being pregnant and in [my] job for less than 12 months.”

It seems that the issues facing many women wanting to return to work are similar for those in the arts than in the general population. Addressing these barriers, such as job security when taking time away from work to have children and access to childcare when returning to work, would contribute to the sustainability of female arts workers’ incomes and careers. Childcare responsibilities and being a single parent were also referenced by women when discussing the barriers to financial security:

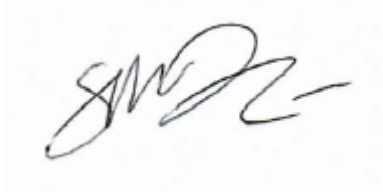
“I practiced as a professional when time from my day job and sole parent duties permitted.”

Recommendations

1. Implementation of Award coverage specifically designed for visual artists and arts workers in the visual art and craft sector. A specific Award for visual and craft artists and arts workers will enable, for the first time in this sector, consistent and transparent pay and conditions in a sector rife with employment inconsistencies and largely unregulated labour.
2. Any Award/s developed for the visual art and craft sector should address:
 - a. The inadequacy of incomes across the visual arts and craft sector (including part-time work in the education sector). An examination of salaries and hourly rates is required to ensure that all people employed in the sector, including those who combine an art practice and arts work, receive an adequate income.
 - b. Gender disparities in pay, representation in senior roles, and barriers to career progression, such as returning to work after taking time away to have children. Access to parental leave, flexible working arrangements and superannuation are key considerations in addressing these gender disparities.
 - c. The prevalence of unpaid labour in the sector and the fact that this load is disproportionately carried by women and those that identify as non-binary. An Award could and should set clear, consistent standards around fair working hours and remuneration for or adequate recognition of overtime (e.g. Time Off in Lieu).
 - d. Standards and settings around unpaid work and volunteer roles in organisations, including what types of work are permitted to be undertaken by volunteers and how much of an organisations’ workload can be done by volunteers. However, this should

not limit the work of artist-run-initiatives, which are often staffed by volunteers by choice and in mutual agreement.

Signed on behalf of the on behalf of the research team leading the ARC Linkage Project Visual Arts Work: sustainable strategies for the Australian visual arts and craft sector (LP200100054).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. McQuilten', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Professor Grace McQuilten
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