

A Profile of Creative Professionals: NZ On Air's perspective

20 May 2019

Purpose

The research project, *A Profile of Creative Professionals*, was jointly funded with Creative NZ. The label “artist”, used for previous research 20 years ago, was updated for this project to “creative professionals” to include a wider range of people pursuing paid creative careers.

NZ On Air and Creative NZ have different mandates. This discussion document sets out initial thoughts from NZ On Air on how the findings impact on or reveal something about the areas we work in – screen, music and sound. In this discussion we are talking specifically about those working in media production, music and sound, acting (which includes screen and theatre), and video game development.

Key findings

- It is clear that the majority of creative professionals covered in this survey have difficulty making a sustainable living from their principal artform/practice.
- The median personal annual income for creative professionals in this survey is \$35,800 – compared to \$51,800 for all New Zealanders earning a wage or salary and \$37,900 for self-employed people. But that includes other sources of income – the median income from creative work is only \$15,000.
- Most rely on other sources of financial support such as another job or a spouse's income to survive, and most can't dedicate as much time to their art or creative practice as they would like.
- The highest paid creative professions in this survey were video game developers and the lowest paid were dancers. Creative professionals in media production and game development have the most sustainable careers. They tend to earn more than average and are more likely to agree there are enough opportunities for them to sustain their career in New Zealand.
- Creative professionals in the acting and theatre production, and music and sound making sectors appear the least sustainable (followed by craft and object arts). They are the least satisfied with their career, and are more likely than average to feel there are insufficient opportunities in New Zealand for them to sustain a career, and to feel they need to go overseas to develop their career.
- Despite low earnings, creative professionals are highly committed to their sector – only 3 percent think they'll leave in the next five years.

Joint priorities

NZ On Air and Creative NZ have agreed to three joint strategic priorities – and these are referenced throughout this discussion document. They are:

1. Fair reward – working towards:

- ensuring lower-paid creative professionals are paid in line with technical professionals

- and lifting pay to the point where creative professionals start to feel it is a fair reward for their work.
2. Sustainability – working to make the careers of mid-career and established creative professionals more sustainable through more continuous creative endeavours.
 3. Emerging creative professionals - working with the sector (including peak bodies and guilds) to find better ways to support creative professionals at the start of their career.

What does it all mean?

There are a number of issues raised by this research for the sectors we work in. Some are outside of our mandate or ability to change. Some are not.

Fair reward

Musicians fall into one of the lower earning groups in this survey. However their income today is largely influenced by the royalties paid by global streaming platforms such as Spotify. NZ On Air doesn't directly pay musicians to make music. We contribute towards the costs of recording and promotion of songs and recording projects. However we can look at the interventions we have in place and ask if they are still the right interventions.

The gender pay gap evident in this research is not unique to creative professionals. It is an issue in most sectors. There isn't yet enough clarity from the research about the reasons for the pay gap in our sectors and whether the underlying reasons are the same or different to other sectors. We need to find out more about this, and then consider what levers we have available to address the issue in the sectors we are involved with.

Sustainability

Income levels across the board are, on average, lower than wage and salary earners but comparable to self-employed people. This is understandable as most creative professionals are self-employed - it is a 'gig' economy.¹ However the necessity in most cases of a job outside the creative sector to 'pay the bills' or a spouse/partner earning a stable income, and the overall perception that it is difficult to make a sustainable living in creative professions, may be limiting the diversity of people involved in these art forms.

We see this, for example, in the low number of director/producer/writer roles in the screen sector filled by Asian New Zealanders. In order to create authentically diverse content we need diverse people in the sector, bringing their lived knowledge and perspectives. This research shows Asian New Zealanders involved in the arts felt unsupported to enter their chosen career because, for example, they were "expected to enter a steady profession".

We think the most useful contribution NZ On Air can make is to maintain a clear strategic focus on maximising content production, creating a degree of stability for creative professionals in a highly uncertain world. To achieve this we need to ensure we ourselves are funded adequately, that we balance our investments across different content types, and that we keep our operating costs comparatively low.

¹ See also the recently published Statistics NZ data on screen industry contractors <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/BU1904/S00288/screen-contractors-move-centre-stage.htm>

Emerging creative professionals

We can also target some investments to content that provides opportunities for newer creatives. We will continue to focus on the emerging professionals who are under-represented on screen and behind the scenes. Our current focus is on talent development pathways for Asian and Pacific creative professionals.

The next section provides the context of what NZ On Air does, and current strategies that may address some of the issues raised.

What we already do

Our funding through the NZ Media Fund supports quality public media that would otherwise not be made, to serve diverse audiences. In so-doing our funding underpins the media and music sectors by supporting many more projects than the market would provide: these then employ actors, directors, writers, crew, and provide opportunities for musicians and those who record their songs.

Alongside our general funding rounds we issue RFPs to ask for targeted content outcomes, to address observed gaps.

We also support a number of professional development initiatives chosen for strategic reasons. While the fund is finite (\$460,000 annually), by partnering with guilds and professional organisations we can help to grow and improve workforce skills and diversity.

Here are some of our recent interventions in the past year:

- An initiative to find drama content specifically created by emerging Asian and Pacific storytellers. Projects must be led or co-led by personnel reflecting the Pacific or Asian cultures depicted within the content.
- A collaboration with the NZ Film Commission for a feature-length, prime-time drama to screen on TVNZ telling a Pacific or Asian story. The team must have Pacific or Asian individuals in at least two of the three key creative roles of writer, producer and director.
- A multi-year initiative with the Directors and Editors Guild to mentor new television drama directors, with a specific emphasis on bringing more women directors through.
- A specific New Music Singles funding round for songs from Pacific artists.
- Support for song writing masterclass SongHubs, which pairs emerging music artists with internationally successful writers to create chart topping music. A SongHubs just for women was held for the first time in 2018.
- A range of music workshop and seminar opportunities that we support including NZ Music Producers Series, Going Global conference, Music Managers Forums (MMF) seminar series, You're the Future of Music.
- Our Diversity report, coming into its 4th year, monitors diversity of people in key roles in screen production (on funded projects) and funded music artists.

What more can we do?

There are some areas where we need more information in order to consider what more, if anything, we can do. There are other areas where we could increase support but this would be at the expense of the amount of funded production. We will continue to balance these competing tensions carefully.

In addition to continuing with the type of interventions already outlined, NZ On Air intends to do the following:

- We intend to maintain our reporting around music and screen production diversity so we, and the sectors, have reliable comparative data to inform funding strategy.

Fair reward

- We will conduct a number of case studies in different funded projects to drill down into pay rates on actual productions. While we will protect anonymity, it is vital we are able to interrogate real information and determine if there are any areas where we can directly or indirectly influence gender pay equity.
- We have asked Women In Film and Television (WIFT) to lead an industry discussion about the gender pay gap. We'd like to see all of the relevant guilds involved in this.

Sustainability

- Our planned review of the New Music funding scheme, now underway and being undertaken by Russell Brown, has come at a good time. The funding we provide is clearly achieving objectives around creating more local music for radio and streaming play and raising the profile of artists. While our funding does directly offset many of the costs to create music content, which artists can then exploit commercially, they still struggle to create a sustainable living. We will look at the outcomes of the New Music funding review in light of *A Profile of Creative Professionals* and consider whether there is any other, better way to support the creation of contemporary music that will be more sustaining for the artists. The review is due for completion towards the end of 2019.

Emerging creative professionals

- We will continue to create content production opportunities (as seen with the Asian and Pacific storytelling initiative) to encourage new young creatives from diverse communities to rise up.