Rising Stars - Investigating support for early career film, video and digital media practitioners in South Australia.

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Abstract The study investigates the adequacy of government-funded support for early career film, video and digital media practitioners in South Australia and explores literature and government policies in the area. A multiple case study approach is then used to examine how a sample of talented and successful creative practitioners, utilise government-funded support to assist in the creation of screen-based work. The research analyses qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews and work histories, as well as quantitative data drawn from income level surveys. The investigation considers: the type of government-funded support utilised; the adequacy of this support; any alternative forms of support utilised; and the impact on early career development. The paper concludes that Government-funded support for early career practitioners in South Australia is not adequate to support talented practitioners who want to earn a fulltime living in the industry.

Biography Phil Callaghan has spent most of his working life in the arts. Phil danced for the West Australian Ballet and Australian Dance Theatre. Following this he was Administrator for Carouselle Theatre and Finance & Administration Manager for the Media Resource Centre. Phil is currently General Manager of Ausdance South Australia. He has a Certificate in Performance (Dance), BA (Psychology) and a Master of Business (Arts & Cultural Management).

Introduction

Early career film, video and digital media practitioners based in South Australia can obtain financial and other support from the AFC, SAFC and MRC. The Media Resource Centre (MRC) is based in Adelaide and is one of a network of five Screen Development Australia (SDA) organisations, funded by the Australian Film Commission (AFC), to support the development of entry level to early career film, video and digital media practitioners. State government funding flows to the MRC via the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC).

Established by the South Australian Film Corporation Act 1972, the SAFC is the birthplace of many Australian cinema classics such as: Picnic at Hanging Rock; Sunday Too Far Away; Storm Boy; Breaker Morant; Gallipoli; Shine; and Rabbit Proof Fence to name a few. There have also been successful television productions such as The Shiralee and McLeod's Daughters. SAFC investment in these productions has assisted the development of leading careers including directors such as Peter Weir, Scott Hicks, Paul Cox and Rolf de Heer. As well as supporting feature film and television production, the SAFC continues to support early career development, through the funding of short films, digital media, government films, professional development initiatives and the MRC.

The MRC commenced in 1974 and was followed by the founding of similar organisations interstate. Together with the MRC these resource organisations: Metro Screen in Sydney; Open Channel in Melbourne; Film & Television Institute in Perth;
and QPIX in Brisbane make up the SDA network. The MRC and the interstate SDA organisations provide a stepping-stone for career pathways in the screen-based media industry. The resources available assist graduates from tertiary courses and offer a ‘many doors’ point of entry for novices. All of the SDA organisations are membership based and provide production support programs offering advice and access to equipment at a low cost.

The AFC is the Federal Government’s agency supporting the development of film, television and interactive digital media projects and their creators. The AFC is funded by the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts, (DCITA). The AFC maintains offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, providing resources mainly in the form of finance and information to people, projects, organisations and events for the purpose of development (AFC Information for Filmmakers 2002:11).

Background

South Australia: ‘the home of independent filmmaking’

The SAFC Annual Report 2001 refers to the SAFC positioning statement that brands South Australia as ‘the centre for independent filmmaking’ (SAFC 2001:7). In an article celebrating the 30th anniversary of the SAFC, Mike Rann, Premier of South Australia and Minister for the Arts, talks about further consolidation of the state’s position as the ‘headquarters of independent film’ and goes on to say that ‘I am keen to substantially expand our local film industry and I want our movie industry to become a much bigger player in SA’s economy.’ In the same article the SAFC estimates that the nine film projects produced in SA in 2000-01 were worth AUD$56.6 million to the state’s economy and generated 404 jobs (Hockley 2002:21).

While these figures sound impressive, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures confirm the high level of concentration of the industry in the Eastern States. New South Wales dominates the film and video production industry accounting for 62% of total industry income, with Victoria accounting for 23% and Queensland a further 10%. The aggregates of the other States and Territories are described as insignificant with South Australia accounting for just 2% of the total income (ABS 1999-2000:5). Similar results are presented in the AFC National Survey of Feature Film & TV Drama Production 2002/03 with SA’s share fluctuating between approximately 1% and 5% of national production over a four-year period (AFC 2003:7).

In the SAFC Annual Report 2001 the Chair states,

I have been very impressed by the calibre, commitment and teamwork of our young filmmakers. Despite cutting their teeth on limited budgets and favours, their creativity, enthusiasm and end product suffer no compromise. It is my clear intention to ensure that the Board of Management of the South Australian Film Corporation continue to give our young talent the opportunity to grow and to fulfil their ambitions (SAFC Annual Report 2001:6).

Career pathways

A study by the AFC of Australian and international funding and practice in the feature film industry investigates the development of projects and practitioners (AFC 2000:10). The report concentrates mostly on feature films, as this is the area where data is most readily available. It identifies the need for greater investment in the development of projects and practitioners in Australia, to bring the industry into line with benchmarks in the UK, Europe and the United States. By comparison, Australian feature films take longer to create, have less investment in the development process and have lower budgets. According to the AFC (2000:10) report, approximately 70% of Australian filmmakers who make a feature will not continue on to make a second full-length film. The high drop out rate at this level is also an indication of the extremely competitive nature of the industry (AFC 2002:5).
The AFC study highlights the importance of the early stages of career development for practitioners and the essential experience that can be gained from working on small projects. This experience can be found in short films, attachments, mentorship, television, mini-series and commercials. It is a key ingredient in developing the skill base required to make a full-length feature. The study notes that the opportunities identified as being necessary for early career development are diminishing. Jeremy Bean author of the AFC study on development states ‘Today's filmmakers do not have the opportunities to gain experience that once were available in Australia’ (AFC 2000:10). The total AFC spend on practitioner development has decreased by AUD$5 million since 1993/4 and there are fewer opportunities available in television, mini-series, commercials, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Commission (SBS).

Economics and arts worker’s income

The MRC Membership Survey (2000) found that 68% of its members earned less than (in Australian dollars) $20k per year, 17% earned from $20k to $29k, 11% earned from $30k to $39k and only 4% earned over $40k. These low-income figures were reported in spite of the fact that 47% of the members had completed tertiary courses, 15% postgraduate courses and 18% TAFE courses. It is clear from these figures that practitioners must survive on relatively low incomes in the establishment phase of their careers. These findings about early career practitioners in the audio-visual industry are consistent with the findings of David Throsby in relation to arts workers in other sectors.

Reports for the Australia Council by Throsby and associates with titles such as: When Are You Going to Get a Real Job (Throsby & Mills 1989), But What Do You Do for a Living? (Throsby & Thompson 1994) and Don’t Give Up Your Day Job (Throsby & Holister 2003), document the relatively low status, low-income levels and poor working conditions afforded to arts workers in Australia. In a paper documenting the history of public funding for the arts in Australia from 1900-2000, Throsby notes that the reports by the Australia Council, while not improving the working conditions of artists have spawned empirical studies, conducted at five-yearly intervals. The studies show that declining real incomes and lack of recognition are ongoing problems for artists. He asserts that arts policy needs to do more to address the problems faced by individual artists (Throsby 2001:15).

In an article entitled Artists’ Subsidy of the Arts, drawing on an idea from the Canadian Federal Cultural Policy Review, Withers (1985:290-295) suggested that there is a ‘hidden subsidy’ of the arts made by artists. Withers asserts that artists receive a low financial return for their work relative to their human capital endowments of talent, education and experience. His empirical evidence shows that by working for low rates of pay and for long hours artists make a contribution to culture that far exceeds the grant monies invested by the state (Withers 1985:293).

In reply to Withers’ argument, Grossman and Kenyon (1989:281) question the notion of artists making a personal financial subsidy to cultural activity. They offer an explanation of artists behavior based on conventional economic theory, positing that an over supply of artists drives down the returns available to artists’ human capital endowments. In a competitive market some existing artists will leave the occupation for more rewarding occupations and some potential new artists will be discouraged from following the artist career path and choose an alternative career. Withers (1989:288) also suggests that in negotiating a career path artists may be risk takers willing to accept the likelihood of a low income in return for a chance to become a ‘star’. The probability of becoming a ‘star’ may be low, but the potential financial and non-financial rewards of ‘star’ status are attractive to the risk taking individual. A further explanation offered by both researchers is that artists are making a lifestyle choice in favor of a way of living that offers many non-financial or intangible benefits.

The example of South Australian filmmaker Scott Hicks is testimony to the length of
time that can be required to build a successful career in the industry. Hicks graduated from Flinders University with a BA (Hons) in 1974. It was not until 1996 that he released the film *Shine* to international acclaim. *Shine* took five years to develop, and in the final stages due to lack of development finance from Australian funding agencies, much of the equity held by the director and producer was ceded to the Disney Corporation (Burgan & Moir 1999:16).

The issues of high competition, low pay, lifestyle, assessment of one’s own talent, estimating the chance of failure or success, and finding the right opportunities for creative output, are important considerations for early career practitioners. Throsby, says of artists,

> The figures show that when it comes to being paid the equivalent of a living wage for their services, artists are at the end of the food chain - they are the last ones to be remunerated and their incomes have been continually declining. (Throsby 2000:172).

It could be said that if arts workers are at the end of the food chain within the Australian economy, then early career arts workers are at the end of the chain within the arts industry itself. They have time on their side, but at the same time need to earn a livelihood.

**A freelance business**

The SAFC has supported filmmakers in South Australia for 30 years. Many of the acclaimed early films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Sunday Too Far Away* and *Breaker Morant* were produced by the SAFC. There was however, a fundamental change in the SAFC’s operations in 1994, when it ceased to be a producer of work in its own right, and became a government agency delivering assistance to an independent industry (Burgan & Moir 2000:1). This shift placed the onus on practitioners to develop their own business structures to create work.

A survey of the careers of Australian Film Institute award nominees entitled *Career Paths in the Australian Film Industry*, (AFC 2001), shows the volatile nature of the industry, with 71% of practitioners working on a freelance basis and earning a living by moving from project to project. One experienced practitioner describes the insecure nature of working on short-term contracts in the following quote:

> Anything longer than 12 weeks would be regarded as a long contract these days. So it really is short-fuse stuff and in the last couple of weeks of someone’s contract looking for the next job. They’ve got to be very nimble on their feet and there’s a sort of gypsy or tribal way of thinking about it (AFC, 2001:3.).

The *BFI Television Industry Tracking Study* describes similar conditions in the television industry in the UK. Approximately half of the employment is freelance work on short-term contracts with freelancers earning less than staff and 65% of 21-30 year olds working as freelancers (BFI 1999:18-19).

**Early career practitioners require multiple sources of support**

The Gonski (1997) *Review of Commonwealth Assistance to the Film Industry* maintained the need for a ‘many doors’ policy that provided producers with a variety of government assistance. The rationale being that a reduction in the avenues of support to a few outlets would concentrate power in the hands of a small and influential group.

That by limiting the number of funding outlets for producers, or maintaining staff in long-term positions of influence, decision making is confined to a small number of (influential) individuals whose personal opinions or taste may be reflected in what is supported and ultimately screened to the public (Gonski 1997:46).
At first it appears that there is a large amount of funding accessible to early career practitioners via a range of sources such as the AFC, SAFC and MRC. There are also other avenues such as the South Australian Youth Arts Board, Adelaide City Council, or commissions by Festivals and other government-funded organisations, for example, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra or the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust. However, the small scale of the grants; eligibility requirements; targeting to specific roles, or media, or art forms; and the high degree of competition, mean that for less experienced practitioners, only a small portion if any of the funds are likely to be secured. The competition in any category is strong given the large number of tertiary graduates and practitioners vying for support for their projects. Even when a practitioner has a sufficient track-record of credits to apply for larger projects the amount of money is not large. The cost of producing work in any format is high and realistic budgets require, creative and technical personnel, hire or purchase of equipment, crew, administration, consumables and so on.

The Study

To research this issue further, the researcher undertook a multiple case study (Yin 2003). The cases studies were five South Australian film, video and digital media enterprises drawn from the membership of the MRC. There was a focus on the first five years of professional practice. The five cases already had a track record of completing funded projects and were recognised as being amongst the most successful creative practitioners in the state. The cases included: a mid thirties freelance digital media practitioner who has worked in a cooperative; a mid twenties creative director of a small digital media company; a mid twenties writer director; two mid twenties writer directors who work collaboratively; and a more experienced mid thirties writer director. The practitioners included in each of the case studies are recognised in the film, video and digital media industry as being talented, productive and highly committed. Their qualifications vary, but include tertiary qualifications, and or, extensive industry experience. Their work is recognised through awards, prizes and inclusion in national and international festival programs. All of the major funding bodies have supported their creative potential through the provision of government grants.

Each enterprise met the following criterion:
- Participants work in film, video or digital media as their main occupation.
- Participants have created three funded pieces of work with a public outcome.
- Participants have been out in the industry for about five to seven years
- Participants have received government funding from more than one source.

Both a quantitative and qualitative approach was used in the case studies, to develop a rich picture of each enterprise (Gummesson 2000). Quantitative data was obtained showing the income levels earned by each of the case study participants during 2000/2001 using the scale <$20k, $20-29k, $30-39k, >$40k. Income level data for early career practitioners was also collected from the MRC 2000 Membership Survey that used the same scale. Data sets obtained from other Screen Development Australia (SDA) organisations (the Film & Television Institute in Perth, Qpix in Brisbane, and Metro Screen in Sydney) that took part in the same membership survey, were included to improve the sample size and to enable interstate comparisons. ABS income statistics for the general population and for the film industry from the 2001 Census were obtained, to provide a national industry comparison. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data from the case study participants (Neuman 2000:32).

Quantitative Data

The income levels reported by the Case Study participants for the 2001/2002 financial year were: 1 case < $20k; 3 cases in the $20-29k range; and 1 case in the $30-39k range. These results show that for the selected sample of highly successful early career practitioners in South Australia, relatively low-income levels are experienced. This occurs even when multiple job holding strategies are utilised. The case study participant earning the highest level of income $30-39k, obtained a significant amount
of this income, from sources outside of the arts sector. The income levels for early career practitioners reported in the SDA 2000 membership survey are consistent with these findings, showing that the majority of early career practitioners earn less than $30k, with a high proportion earning less than $20k.

The results confirm relatively low-income levels for most early career film, video and digital media practitioners in Australia. For comparison, the average fulltime annual earnings reported by the ABS for the Australian workforce in November 2000 was $43,508, rising to $45,921 in November 2001 (Average Weekly Earnings 2001:5). The Henderson Poverty Line for a single person in 2000/2001 was a disposable annual income of $15,121 or a before tax income of $17,160 (Poverty Lines 2002:1).

ABS 2001 Census data for Australian Film and Video Production, by percentage of Employed Persons by Income Level by State, shows that for the industry as a whole, there are large numbers of practitioners earning in the lower income bands, with 38% earning less than $31,200. The proportion of low-income earners in the industry is more pronounced in the smaller states. The bigger states NSW and VIC, account for the largest number of individuals working in the industry, and the greatest number of individuals earning in the higher income ranges. South Australia has 8% of the national population and 5% of Film & Video Production.

Overall, the income results show that SA might be seen to be under achieving in terms of the national film and video production industry. Relative to the national picture, there are a high proportion of low-income earners in the industry in SA. In addition, the research sample demonstrates that some of the most talented and successful early career practitioners, while taking on multiple jobs, nevertheless struggle to earn an average income.

**Qualitative Data**

In the interviews all the practitioners indicated from the outset, that they were extremely grateful for the government support they had received. This sense of gratitude and privilege extends to feelings of humility, almost mild embarrassment, that they had been successful, where perhaps other worthy projects had not. Most had a sense of empathy for others trying to pursue a career in the same industry.

At the early career stage, all practitioners accepted the reality that government funding would only make up part of the budget for their projects. In this sense of helping to build a list of credits, the government-funded support was found to be minimal, but enough to provide the bare essentials to create work. It was not adequate however, to enable participants to earn a reasonable reliable income or to sustain fulltime work in their chosen career. In addition to the government grants, most of the participants utilised small amounts of non-financial government-funded support, in the form of free or subsidised access to space, equipment and advice. All believed that greater government-funded in-kind support would be helpful.

Obtaining multiple sources of support enabled the practitioners to bring projects to fruition in a lean funding environment. All recognised the importance of securing support from more than one source as a vital ingredient to progressing in the industry. The amount and source of non-government support varied and depended to some extent on the individual’s personal style and network of contacts. There was some evidence that it was easier to leverage additional support in the case of well-funded projects. Additional resources were obtained from a variety of avenues including private sector investment, commercial commissions or sales, funds from foundations and in-kind support from sources ranging from industry suppliers, to fellow practitioners, to family and friends.

The biggest in-kind contribution to all of the works, was the practitioner’s own unpaid work and following this, the contribution of others working in a voluntary capacity. While this support appears vital in the creation of early career works, there is an awareness
that the mutual obligations arising from these bargains or exchanges, need to be dealt
with in a professional manner. The preferred scenario for all of the practitioners, if it
were financially possible, would be to pay everyone taking part, at reasonable rates.
Achieving a level of financial resources that enables workers to be paid properly is a
major goal for the practitioners. It involves creating a standard of project that is
marketable enough to attract the right combination of government and private sector
investment.

Mentorship and external sources of advice were also highly valued forms of in-kind
support received by the participants. As one practitioner commented ‘it’s not what you
know, it’s who you know’. External advisors were helpful in terms of gaining access to
useful information and in overcoming a sense of isolation. Encouragement from an
older person that had managed to succeed in establishing a career path in the industry,
was particularly valued. At the same time it was recognised that no two practitioners are
the same and that career paths and creative outputs will vary, according to each
individual’s talents and experiences. It seems therefore, that one of the tasks for the
early career practitioner is to find a mentor who is well matched in terms of
experiences, skills and interests.

Survival Strategies

In order to continue to pursue a career path in the film, video and digital media
industries and earn enough money to survive, participants utilised strategies such as
multiple job holding, adopting multiple roles and working from home. Multiple job
holding means taking on additional work that is compatible with the pursuit of a career
in the industry. The type of work depended on the skills of the individual, but in each
case, it seemed to involve the application of a skill, that is related to the practice in the
arts.

For the technically orientated, work may be obtained in IT support, as a computer
technician or in production management. For the more person orientated, the work
might involve administration, marketing, event management, volunteer coordination,
performing, teaching and tutoring. In order to keep pursuing the arts career path,
practitioners tried to find a balance between obtaining enough work to survive, and
ensuring there was enough time available to complete artistic projects. The reality is
that a compatible job, or series of jobs, must be found in order to continue to create
work as an early career practitioner in South Australia.

Taking on multiple roles in the production process is a strategy applied by the
participants in each case study. The following quote provides an example of the
reasoning behind these strategies.

I wrote, directed, produced and I edited the bulk of it, because I couldn’t afford
to ask someone to do that for me. I actually did ask some people, but they did
want some money and I couldn’t afford them.

Multiple role holding may be attributed to two main factors. Firstly as a way of keeping
costs down. Taking on more than one role such as writer, director, producer and
editor, saves money by reducing the need to pay others for these services. It also
gives a strong amount of creative control over the project. It reduces some of the time
that is required to deal with others in a larger team or more collaborative approach.
The downside is that during demanding periods in the project, the physical and
mental resources of the practitioner can be too thinly spread, and the quality of output
in each area may suffer as a result. These problems are exemplified by the following
quote:

And that’s the problem with not having a lot of support that you can end up
working so hard as an administrator, as a promoter, as a producer that when
you actually come to being an artist you kind of fail!
Despite the pressures involved in this approach it should be noted that there are a number of highly successful South Australian writer/director/producers who have gone on to make feature films, holding multiple roles and exercising a high degree of personal control over their projects.

Secondly, in the early phase of a career, taking on multiple roles or multi-skilling is an efficient way to acquire a broad range of experience and skills that will be useful later when more specialisation is required. So for example a person that goes on to specialise as a director, will benefit from an understanding of how a writer crafts a screen play; the vital role of the producer in securing and managing finances for the project; and the influence of the editor in determining the final nature of the screened product.

Working from home is a cost saving measure utilised by all of the practitioners at some stage. Improvements in computers and communications technology make this feasible and it is becoming a more common way of working. There are however, some pressures that go along with this type of practice such as, a sense of isolation and lack of direct contact and communication with others. Working from a corner of one’s bedroom, the study or dining room table, can make it difficult to escape or switch off from work, and there is not usually enough space for meetings, or tasks that involve a larger number of people working together.

Challenges

The financial pressures flowing from the relatively low incomes and need to juggle multiple jobs, lead to sacrifices in terms of lifestyle and income security. These compromises were usually made in the belief that things would improve at some point in the future. There was also an awareness that better paying career opportunities may be being passed up, in order to pursue a relatively low-income early career path in film, video and digital media.

Time pressure is something that all of the participants experienced. This is concisely expressed in the following quote:

   A key thing is time. Like having to manage time, with trying to balance time to be a filmmaker and also trying to make enough money to survive.

To cope with these competing demands all of the practitioners worked at being efficient managers of time. Many of the tasks involved in the industry are complex and require the devotion of considerable amounts of time. There was an expectation amongst some that if a task was being done for artistic reasons then it was justifiable to spend extra time on it. This combined with pressure from other work commitments could lead to fatigue, diminished motivation and a lack of energy. It could also result in pressure on personal relationships and a lack of time for a life outside of the industry. This pressure was particularly intense when deadlines loomed, such as the completion of a large project.

The participants all maintained a positive outlook and presentation, even in the face of challenges and difficulties. This was evidenced by positive attitudes, a sense of humour and an ability to laugh about some of the pressures that they faced. In the industry, it seems that the values of competition and camaraderie can sit side by side in, at times, an uneasy coalition. While artistic and intellectual values may promote the sharing of ideas, collaborative spirit, cooperation and mutual support, the realities of economic competition can have the potential to promote cliques, secrecy, exploitation and exclusion. The success of a project can depend on the ability to gather resources, including the involvement of other talented individuals, and the confidence of backers in the face of strong competition. As much of the marketing of projects and individuals occurs in semi-social environments and through networking, it can be challenging to maintain a positive self-presentation that engenders confidence and helps to promote the relationships and contacts that will lead to involvement in future work.
Although each of the participants varies greatly in their experiences, talents, skills and abilities, all of them hope to make the leap at some stage to creating fully financed projects, working fulltime for a stable and reasonable income, and creating more artistically significant work.

**Conclusion**

The results show that for the selected sample of South Australia’s highly successful early career film, video and digital media practitioners, the reality of earning a living and pursuing a career in the industry is not an easy one.

The adoption of strategies such as multiple job holding, multiple role holding and working from home, enable practitioners to create work on albeit low incomes. These strategies have benefits in terms of gathering a range of experiences while also providing alternative career options, should the chosen career path not eventuate. These research findings are consistent with the tough working conditions for arts workers described by Withers (1985), Grossman & Kenyon (1989) and Throsby (2000). The findings may seem a little surprising given the more commercial nature of the film, video and digital media industries and therefore the expectation that higher incomes might result.

Most practitioners would accept the notion of an industry pyramid with the more experienced practitioners at the top and the less experienced waiting to ‘serve an apprenticeship’ or ‘pay ones dues’ before climbing towards the pinnacle (MRC 2001:2). However, in this example, if some of the best talent in the state is finding it hard to make progress after five years, especially in an environment that has included a considerable boost in government funding, then this may be an indication of an unhealthy or unsustainable system (Throsby 2001:53).

At the early career stage, the over supply of practitioners and high degree of competition for resources, as described by Grossman and Kenyon (1989:281), are certainly evident. In a climate of increased funding designed to stimulate growth in the South Australian industry, doubling turnover and employment by 1 July 2004, it would be a concern if the more talented practitioners were unable to obtain sufficient resources to create work. Throsby argues that an over emphasis on economic imperatives driving arts policy may do so at the expense of creativity and other cultural dimensions (Throsby 2001:134).

From the case studies examined, it can be concluded that government-funded support for early career film, video and digital media practitioners in South Australia, is currently not adequate to support talented practitioners earning a fulltime living in the industry, during the first five years of their career. This situation exists, despite recent increases in funding designed to double the turnover of the industry and to stimulate employment growth. The evidence, gathered in this study, suggests that an increase in the levels of government-funded support targeted to talented early career practitioners in film, video and digital media in South Australia, is needed. This is not simply a matter of allocating more money, but also about making the best use of the funds available. Determining the best mechanisms to deliver improved support through government agencies, which agencies should be involved, and how practitioners can best access this support, are all complex questions, warranting further research.

In spite of the lean funding environment, it is clear from the study that practitioners are resourceful in finding alternative forms of support to enable them to create work. This task is easier in the case of better-funded projects. In addition to grant funding, some government-funded in-kind support, such as free or subsidised access to equipment, facilities and advice, is accessed. More of this type of assistance is desirable. Participants varied in the forms of alternative support that they utilised, depending on their network of contacts and personal style of operating. The alternative resources obtained included: commercial payments, private sector investments, loans, grants
from foundations, commissions, sponsorships and donations from suppliers, family and friends and people volunteering their time.

It also emerges from the study that there are other ways to assist, aside from government support, where practitioners can help themselves. This might include for instance: greater use of in-kind assistance, targeting the right forms of private sector support, forming mentor relationships, creating and finding compatible employment, becoming more efficient self-administrators and self promoters, working on a slate of projects, managing time effectively, developing a range of skills or focusing on a special skill, and building small teams.

Thus in order to follow a career path in the industry of their choice, early career film, video and digital media practitioners adopt a variety of strategies to survive. These include multiple job holding, alternating between jobs, multiple role holding and working from home. These strategies have benefits such as gaining a breadth of experience, mastering a variety of skills, learning to work independently and exploring alternative career path options. However, this style of working also presents challenges that impact on the rate of career progress and the quality of creative output. These challenges include a low and unpredictable income, time pressure, coping with a sense of isolation, maintaining motivation, keeping a positive outlook and self-presentation, dealing with self-administration issues and steadily preparing for the future.

As noted at the outset (Throsby & Holister 2003, Throsby 2001), working in the arts is beset by low wages and many accompanying challenges. This study focuses on one sector and shows that there is scope for improving outcomes through carefully targeted assistance, training and development, and the provision of greater support to the individuals involved. Such assistance has the potential to provide additional benefits to the whole community through improvements in productivity and creativity.

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