

National Arts Council, Singapore

Arts and Culture Employment Study 2016

19th December 2017

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Overview

The Arts and Culture Employment Study (ACES) is a survey conducted to help the National Arts Council, Singapore (NAC) better understand the employment conditions within the arts sector.

The survey reached out to a total of 937 respondents across six art forms. Respondents were asked questions on their working conditions; income; career satisfaction; job security and employability; career motivations; and training and development needs

Findings from this study will be used to help the NAC develop better manpower and professional development policies and programmes for the arts sector.

Research Design & Approach

Scope

The study covered Singapore citizens, Permanent Residents, and work pass holders (i.e. those who held an Employment Pass, S-Pass or Work Permit) who undertook full-time, part-time or freelance¹ work in the arts sector. These respondents had to be at least 15 years old, and had to have spent at least 6 months of 2015 working in the arts sector in Singapore.

Employees of the Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth (MCCY), the National Arts Council, Singapore (NAC), and the National Heritage Board, Singapore (NHB) were excluded from participating in the study.

Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted from March to October 2016. The study was widely publicised in order to reach out to as many potential survey respondents as possible. Potential survey respondents provided their contact details when they registered to participate in the study. Suitable candidates were then contacted for a face-to-face interview in one of the four official languages of Singapore (English, Chinese, Malay, Tamil).

Limitations of the study

1. As a sampling frame for people working in the arts sector (on a full-time, part-time or freelance basis) is still under development, the survey's respondent profile is a preliminary estimate. With repeated iterations of the survey, a more representative profile of the arts sector can then be obtained.
2. The study is also focused specifically on the arts sector, and so cannot be used to understand income and employment conditions in the broader creative industries such as the design, media, entertainment, events and hospitality sectors.

¹ Please refer to page 4 for a glossary that defines full-time, part-time and freelance work.

Glossary

The following terms will be used in this document:

Table 1: Terms and Definitions of the Arts and Culture Employment Study

Term		Definition
Singapore Resident		Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents
Employment Status	Full-timer(s)	Worked 35 hours or more a week or signed a full-time employment contract but may officially work less than 35 hours per week.
	Part-timer(s)	Worked less than 35 hours a week. ²
	Freelancer(s)	A worker contracted by a client to provide specific skills, services or products within a specified period of time. The nature of work is project-based, and there are no legal restrictions that forbid the worker from taking on multiple projects with different clients at the same time. The worker must also be paid for the services or products provided to the client.
Portfolio Career		A portfolio career is one in which instead of working a traditional full-time job, you work multiple part-time jobs (including part-time employment, temporary jobs, freelancing, and self-employment) with different employers that when combined are the equivalent of a full-time position. ³
Resident Household		<p>A household refers to a group of two or more persons living together in the same house and sharing common food or other arrangements for essential living. It also includes a person living alone or a person living with others but having his own food arrangements. Although persons may be living in the same house, they may not be members of the same household.</p> <p>A resident household refers to a household headed by a Singapore citizen or permanent resident.</p>

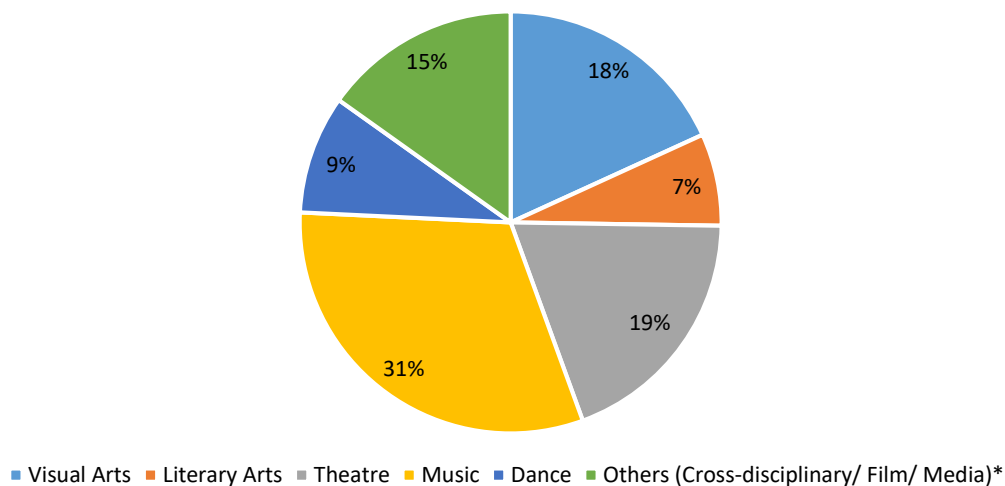
² Source: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/employment-act/who-is-covered>.

³ Source: <http://www.livecareer.com/quintessential/portfolio-careers>

Respondent Profile

A total of 937 responses were achieved for this study.

Figure 1: Respondent Profile by Art Form

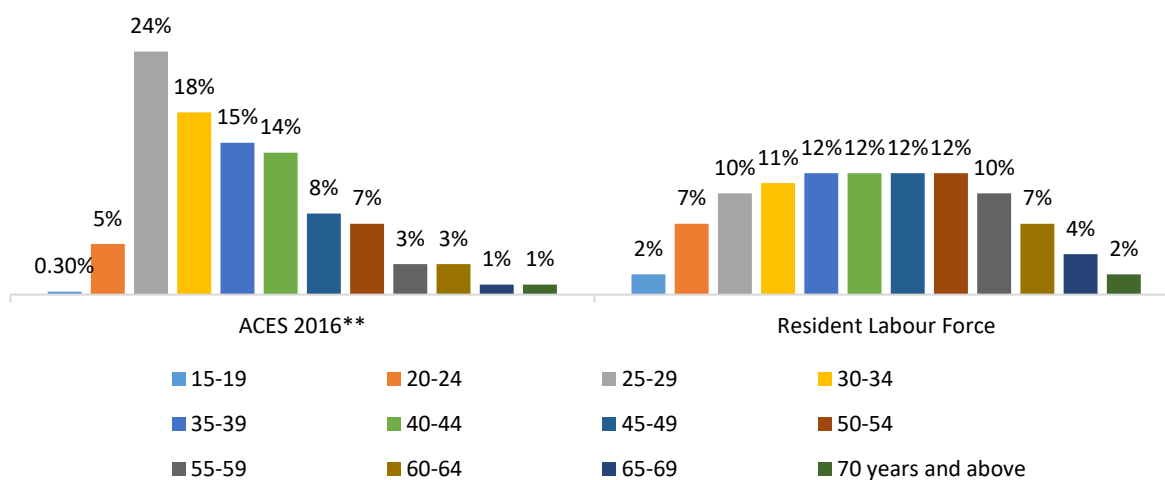


(Base: n = 937)

Demographic Profile

Almost half (47%) of the respondents were youths;⁴ age representation differs from the overall labour force (30%).⁵

Figure 2: Respondent Profile by Age



(ACES 2016 Base: n = 937)

* Others is an aggregate of respondents who are in Film/Media or cross-disciplinary art forms.

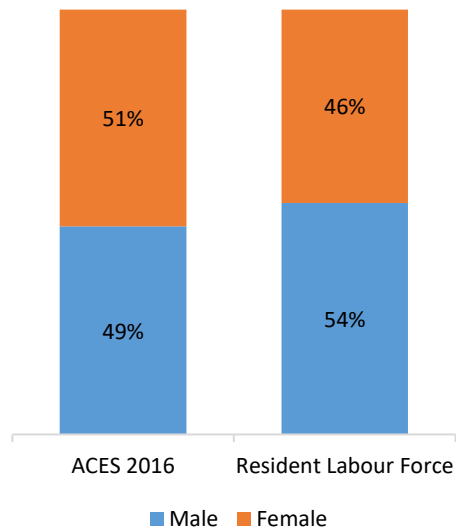
** Some respondents are work pass holders (n=32).

⁴ Youths here are defined as those between 15-34 years old. Source: <https://nyc.gov.sg/faqs>.

⁵ Source: National Data gathered from <http://www.stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-In-Singapore-2015.aspx>.

Gender representation is similar to that of the overall labour force.⁶

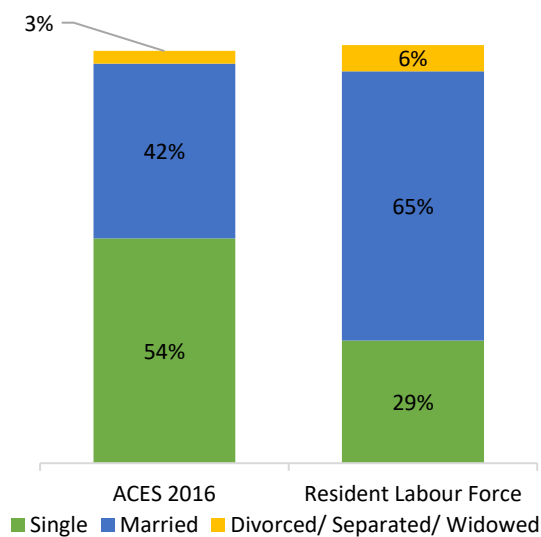
Figure 3: Respondent Profile by Gender



(ACES 2016 Base: n = 937)

There is a higher proportion of singles (54%) working in Singapore's arts and culture sector as compared to the overall labour force (29%).⁷

Figure 4: Respondent Profile by Marital Status



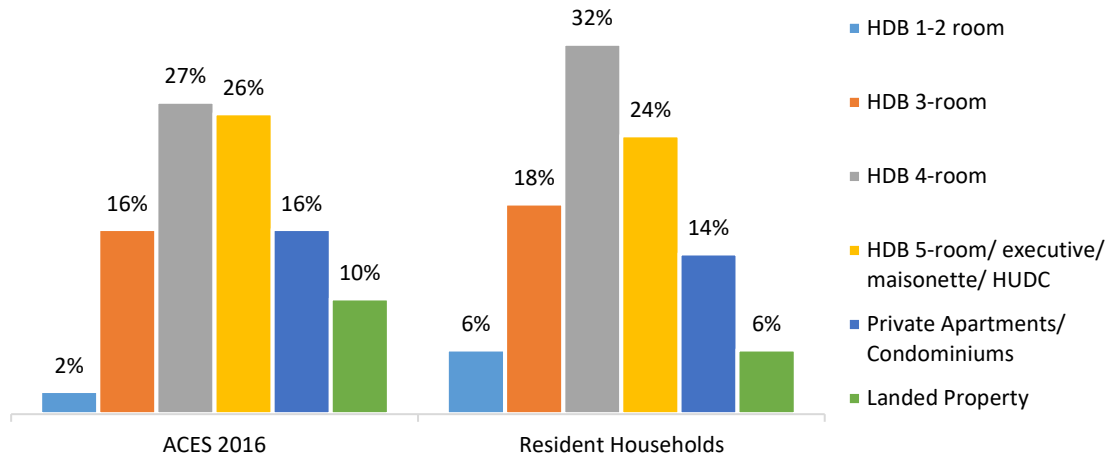
(ACES 2016 Base: n = 937)

⁶ Source: National Data gathered from <http://www.stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-In-Singapore-2015.aspx>.

⁷ Source: National Data gathered from <http://www.stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-In-Singapore-2015.aspx>.

A higher proportion (52%) of respondents also lived in larger Housing Development Board (HDB) flats⁸ and private properties as compared to the population (44%).⁹

Figure 5: Respondent Profile by Dwelling Types



(ACES 2016 Base: n = 937)

⁸ Larger here is defined as flats which are larger than 100 sq. meters. Source: www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/residential/buying-a-flat/resale/types-of-flats.

⁹ Source: National Data gathered from: http://www.singstat.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/publications/publications_and_papers/population_and_population_structure/population2016.pdf.

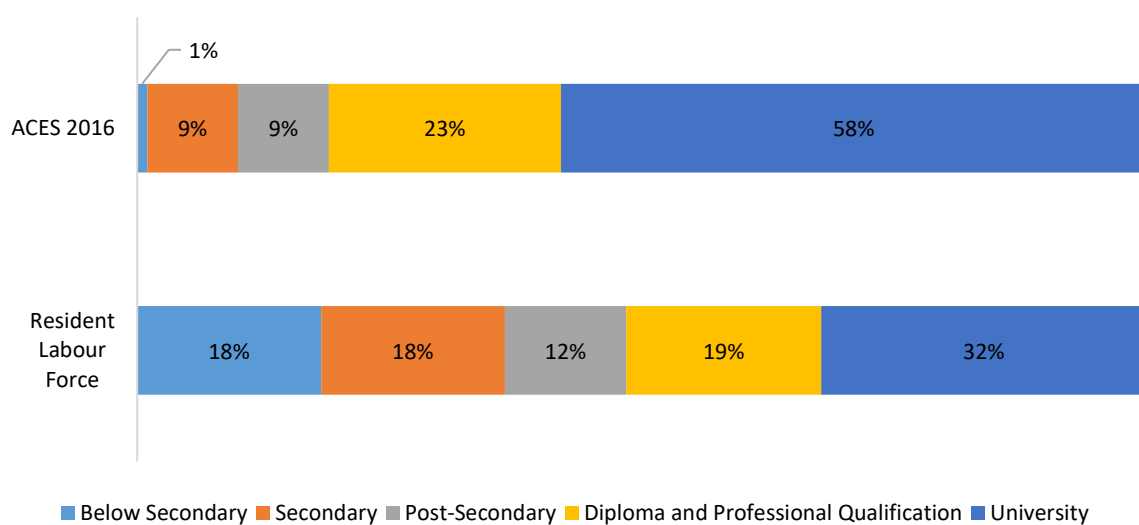
Key Findings

The Profile of an Arts Worker

Arts workers are highly educated and trained, and are passionate about contributing positively to society through their work.

58% of arts workers surveyed had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree compared to 32% nationally.¹⁰

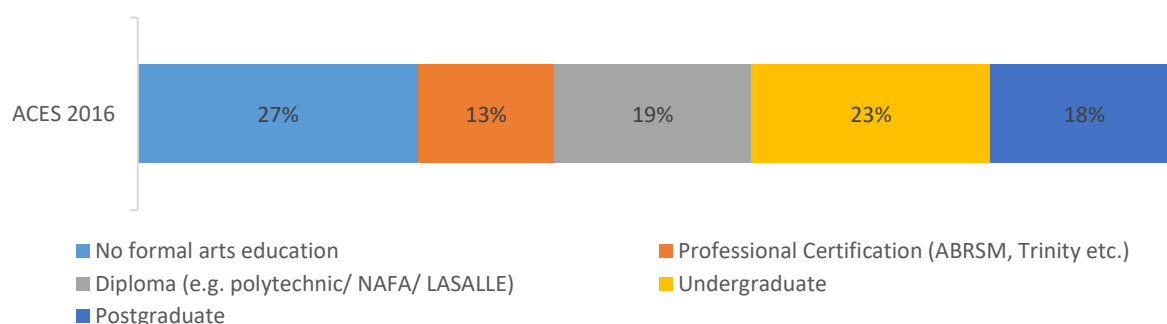
Figure 6: Educational Qualifications



(ACES 2016 Base: n = 937)

73% of arts workers surveyed also had an arts-related qualification.

Figure 7: Arts-related Educational Qualifications



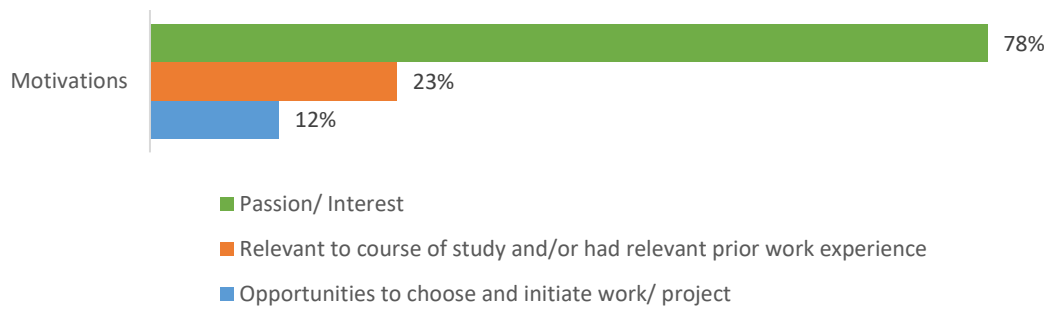
(Base: n = 937)

¹⁰ Source: National Data gathered from <http://www.stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-In-Singapore-2015.aspx>.

Passion was the most critical factor that drew workers to the arts sector; it is also the main reason why these workers remained in the sector. Arts workers also saw themselves as contributing positively to the arts and the wider society through their work.

The top reason cited for choosing to work in the arts sector was passion and interest.

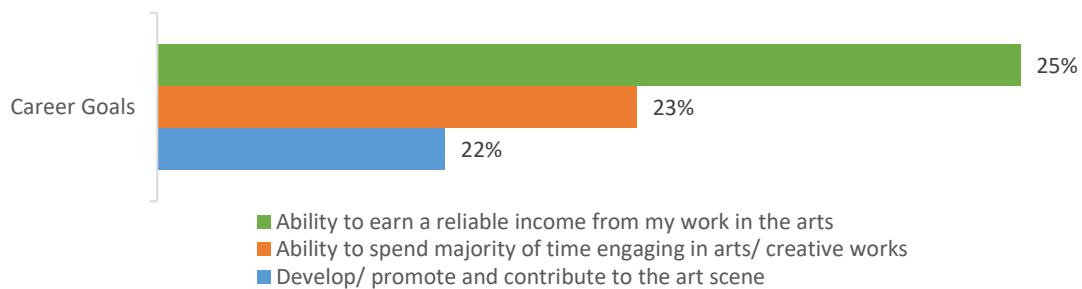
Figure 8: Top 3 Reasons for Entering the Arts



(Base: n = 937)

The top career goal for arts workers surveyed was to earn a reliable income from their work.

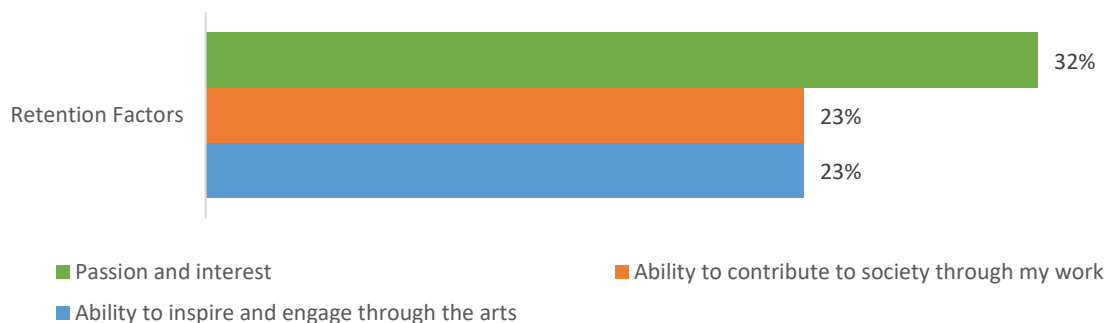
Figure 9: Top 3 Career Goals



(Base: n = 937)

Besides passion and interest, the ability to contribute to the arts and wider society, as well as the ability to inspire and engage were the main reasons why arts workers surveyed continued to work in the arts.

Figure 10: Top 3 Reasons for Staying in the Arts



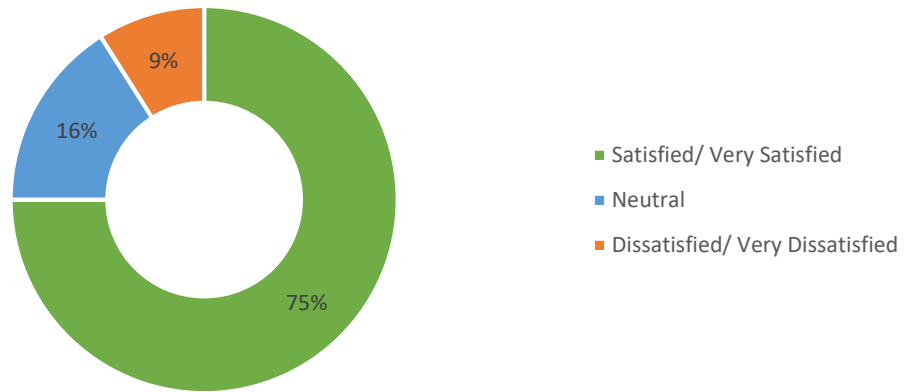
(Base: n = 937)

The Nature of an Arts Career

A career in the arts is satisfying and intrinsically rewarding.

75% of arts workers surveyed were satisfied with their careers.

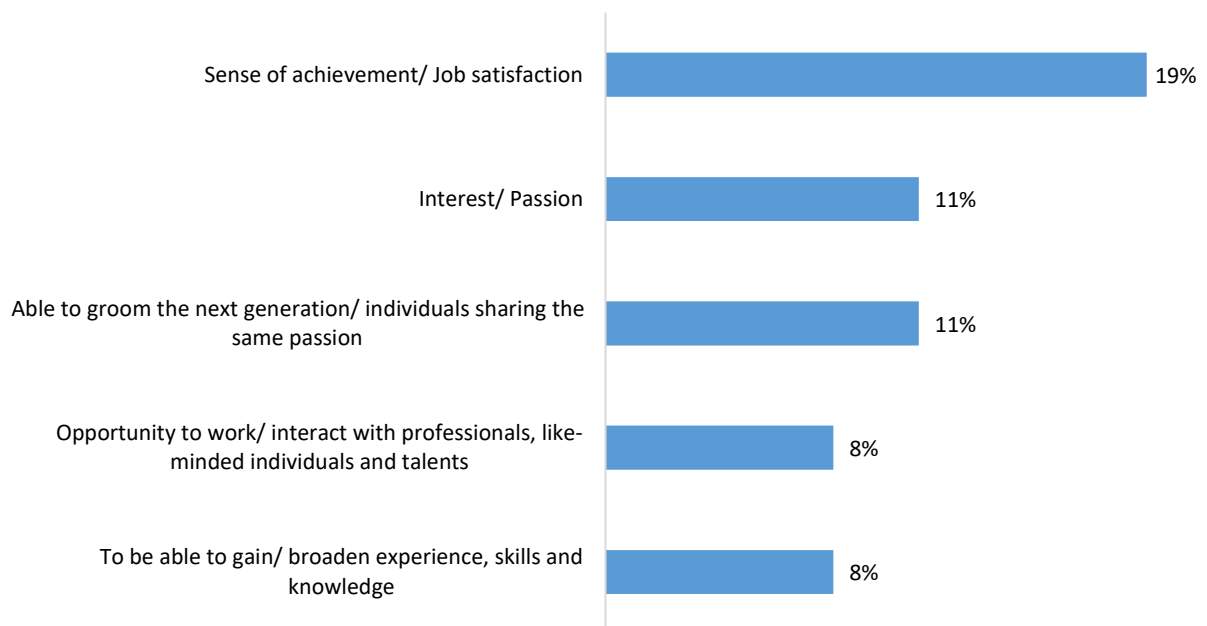
Figure 11: Satisfaction with Career in the Arts



(Base: n = 937)

Arts workers surveyed also saw their careers as being intrinsically satisfying. 30% derived a sense of achievement from their work in the arts, and because they were working in an area of their passion and interest. Another source of satisfaction for 19% of arts workers came from the sense that they were interacting with others – be it in grooming the next generation of arts workers or working with like-minded talents.

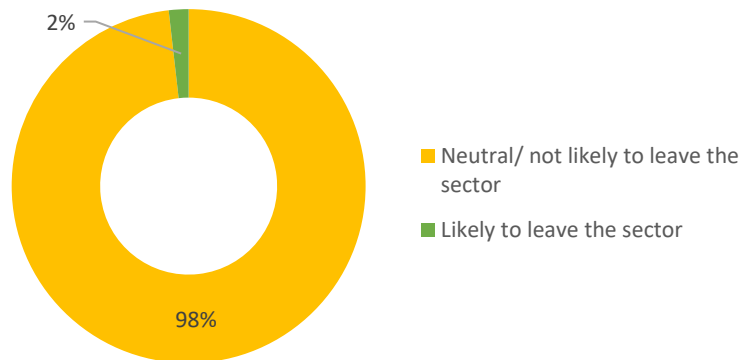
Figure 12: Top 5 Aspects of Career Arts Workers Were Most Satisfied With



(Base: n = 937)

Not surprisingly, as most arts workers have come into and stayed in this sector out of passion and interest, only 2% of arts workers surveyed intended to leave the sector in the next year.

Figure 13: Expected Industry Attrition

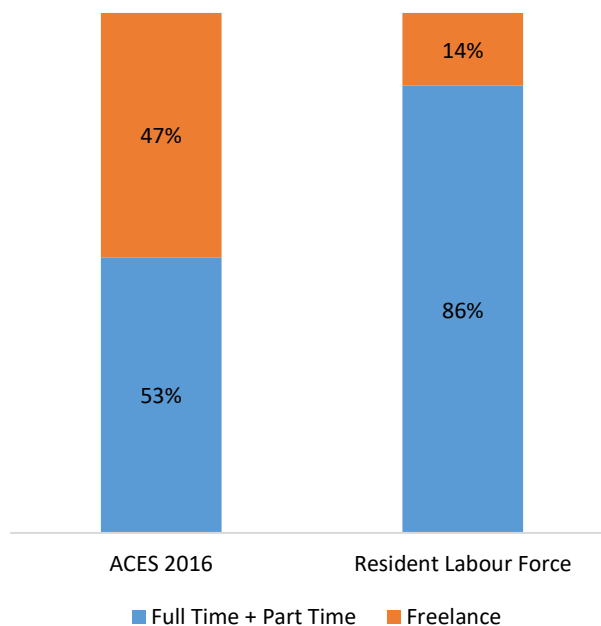


(Base: n = 937)

Arts workers appear to be well-positioned for the future of work because many of them already adopt portfolio careers.

47% of arts workers surveyed were freelancers, which is higher than the national proportion (14%).¹¹

Figure 14: Respondent Profile by Employment Status

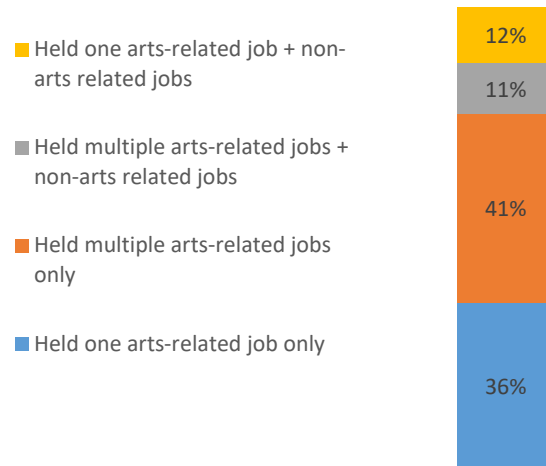


(ACES 2016 Base: n = 937)

¹¹ Source: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/parliament-questions-and-replies/2016/0229-written-answer-by-mr-lim-swee-say-pq-on-freelancers-and-self-employed-workers>.

In the next decade, the gig economy¹² will be a key feature of the world. Arts workers appear well-prepared for this trend since 64% of arts workers surveyed already hold portfolio careers.

Figure 15: Portfolio Careers In the Arts

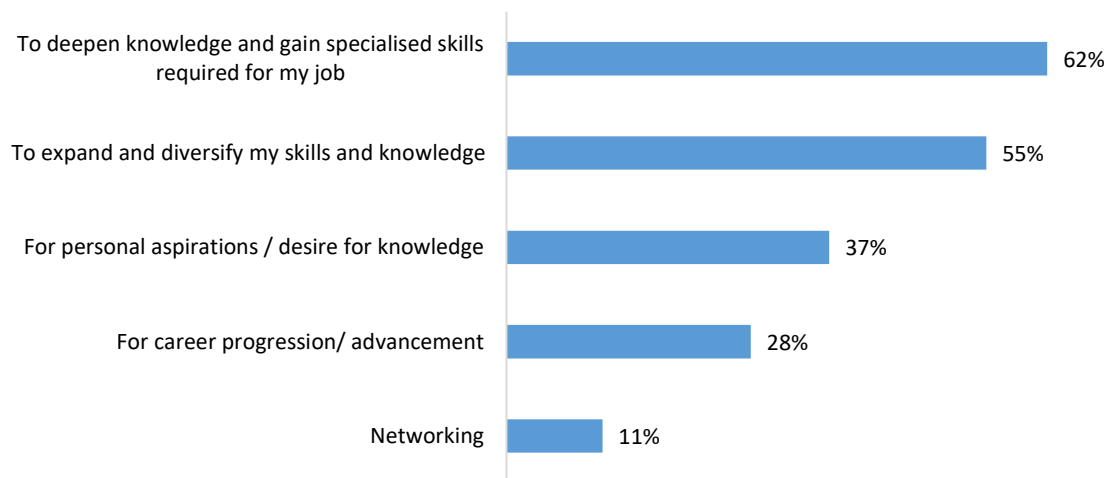


(Base: n = 937)

¹² Source: <https://www.gov.sg/microsites/future-economy/the-cfe-report/read-the-full-report>

Arts workers are motivated to develop themselves professionally.

Figure 16: Top 5 Reasons for Pursuing Training



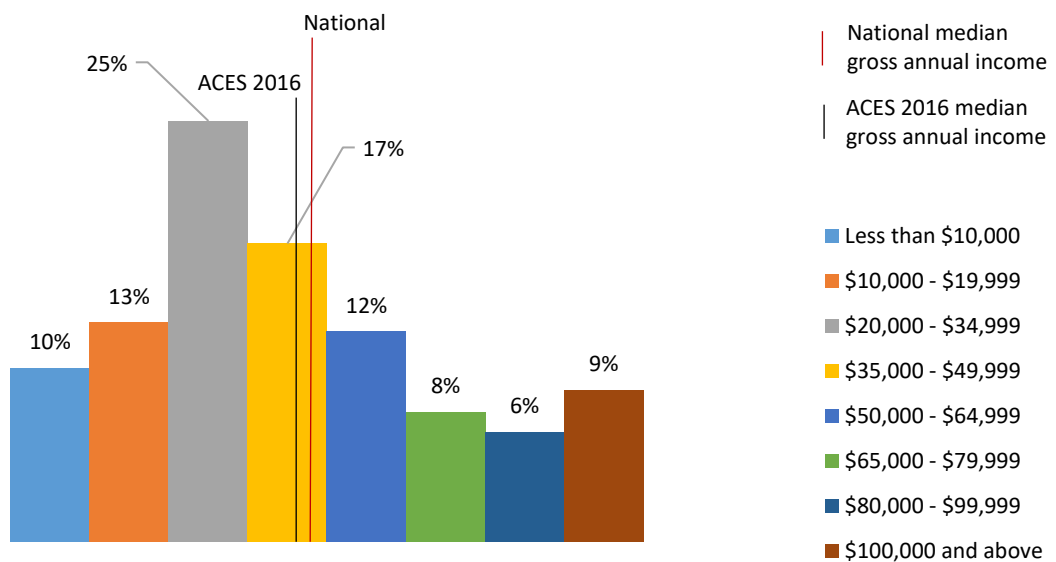
(Base: n = 937)

Employment Conditions in the Arts Sector

In order for arts careers to remain viable and sustainable, working conditions within the sector can be enhanced.

The median gross annual income for arts workers surveyed is \$42,000. This is below the national median gross annual income of \$47,388.¹³

Figure 17: Gross Annual Income (includes non-arts related work)

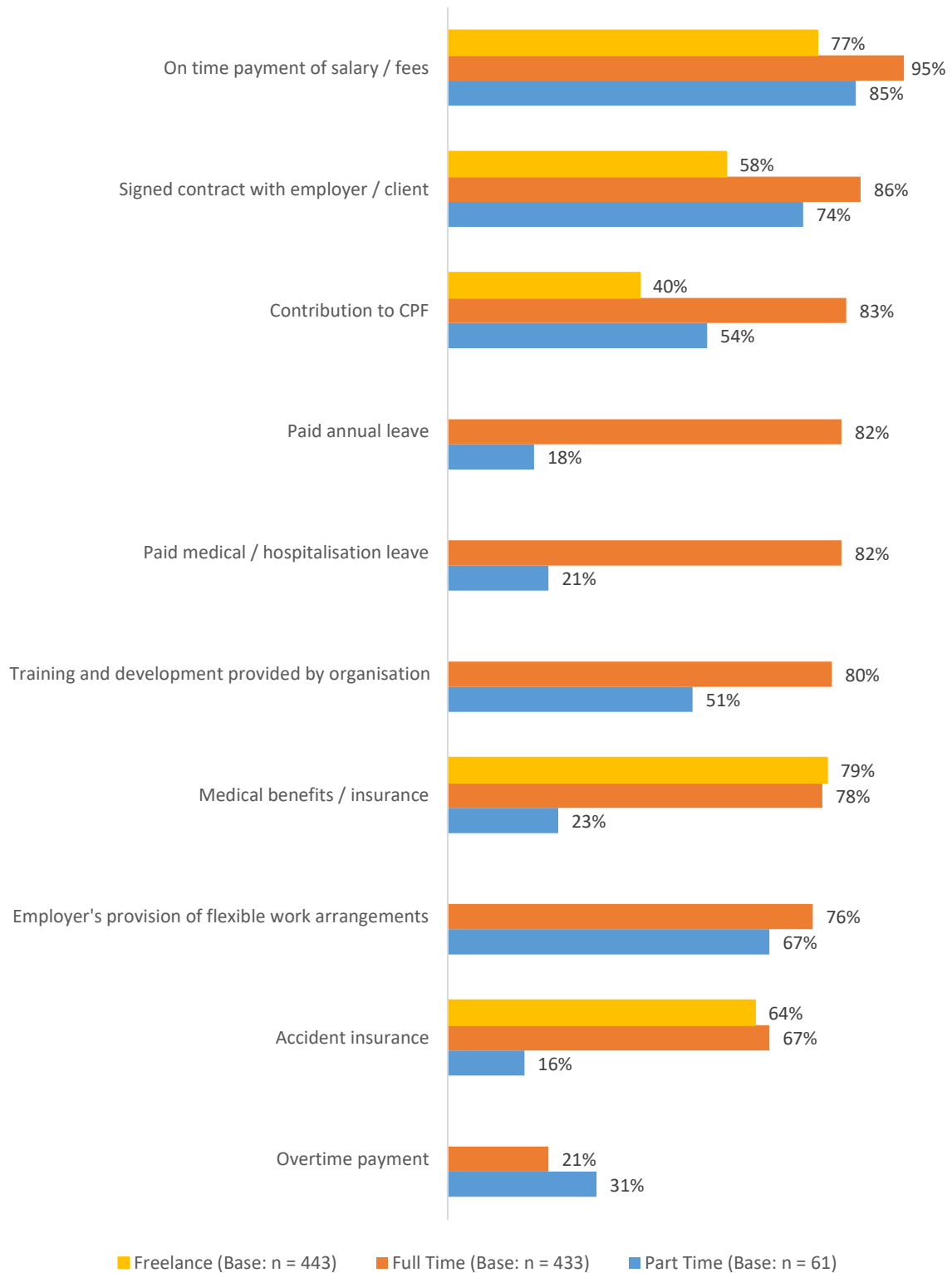


(Base: n = 937)

¹³ Source: stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Income-Summary-Table.aspx.

In comparison with full-time and part-time arts workers surveyed, freelancers were less likely to be paid on time, have signed contracts with their clients, or have received Central Provident Fund (CPF) contributions.

Figure 18: Working Conditions within the Arts



Building a Career in the Arts

The National Arts Council interviewed three artists to shed more light on what it is like to work in the arts industry. They are “Paddy” Jonathan Ong, lead vocalist of M1LDL1FE; Kamini Ramachandran, storyteller and director of MoonShadowStories; and Han Sai Por, a sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient.

Some artists may have to find their own ways of sustainably practising their art-making. For instance, in addition to performing their original music at venues, M1LDL1FE also performs at corporate functions. Paddy himself works full-time as an Associate Librarian with the National Library Board. According to Paddy, he has to be disciplined in managing both his artistic pursuits and his job. “It’s also about forcing yourself not to slide into the pattern of coming home from work and just resting,” he says. Though he likens his current situation as an artist to be like working at a start-up, he says that it allows him to pursue his passion in music.

Over time, an artist may decide to go full-time into the arts. Kamini was previously working in an editorial position before she decided to devote herself to her craft as a storyteller. She took a calibrated and strategic approach in building a recognizable brand for MoonShadowStories. Freelance work has also shown her the importance of negotiating with clients, whether this is on the scope of work, or fair remuneration, sharing that “most artists aren’t aware that they can do [that]”. Besides honing her craft, she also mentors younger storytellers through The Storytelling Centre Limited. There, she instils the same professionalism by ensuring that her artist-mentees enjoy fair working conditions. “You shape an artist by paying them a fair wage and making them realise their value,” she says. She recognises the importance of mentoring the next generation of storytellers as a way to ensure the long-term sustainability of the industry.

Reflecting on her long career in the arts, Sai Por also believes that it is important to build an environment conducive to art-making. She herself worked in various jobs before pursuing art full-time later in life in 1997, although she says that being an artist isn’t necessarily only about art-making — “if you [study] art, you can also do design work or teach.” She is also more hopeful for the younger generation of artists who have more ways to present their work to audiences. Ultimately, however, she believes that growing the pool of audiences can help support the work of emerging artists over the long-term. “We need to build an environment where more people appreciate art. If more people enjoy art, then more young people can be supported.”

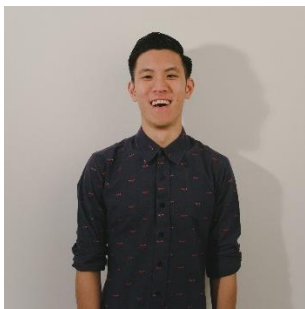
The artists interviewed also recognised the importance of continuing to improve on their mastery of their respective art forms. Paddy, for instance, thinks that local musicians could benefit from learning

from experts from abroad on how they can expand their reach beyond Singapore. He believes in the value of exporting Singaporean music to overseas markets. “Why do we only keep our music here? The world is our hinterland,” he says. Similarly, Kamini believes that artists should learn to be more resourceful in leveraging their professional networks in order to secure and successfully execute projects. “Know your communities of practice. Speak to people. Invite them to your events!” To her, self-learning is an important skill. Sai Por echoed similar sentiments. Even in the advanced stages of her career, she is still deepening her practice.

Their work has also impacted audiences in several ways. Sai Por has noticed that her work has sometimes sparked the curiosity of her viewers to find out more about her art. “Some people have come to visit my studio after seeing my art,” she says. For others, it could mean bringing people with similar interests together. Paddy spoke about how some of his band’s fans started The Gig People, a platform that aims to create a sense of community in the local music scene. Paddy felt very inspired when he first learnt what his fans had done. He hastened to stress that this could just as easily have happened at any other musician’s event. “The point is that local music appreciation is growing and we have a generation that is beginning to take ownership in growing their communities.”

On a more personal level, Kamini has seen her work connecting different generations of audiences to Singapore’s history. For the exhibition ‘Witness to War: Remembering 1942’ at the National Museum of Singapore, she is performing oral accounts of World War 2 to families who visit the gallery. Parents have told her that her storytelling has allowed children to better understand the wartime experience, something that can feel remote from their own lives in the present. Similarly, children have also come up to her after performances, interested to find out more about the people whose stories she shares. “I now realise the impact of our past stories, and how people can be moved regardless of how far removed they are from the past itself”.

Interviewees



"Paddy" Jonathan Ong is the vocalist of home-grown indie band M1LDL1FE. The band has performed locally at Baybeats, Music Matters Live and the Singapore Grand Prix, and internationally in China, Spain, Thailand and Malaysia. Paddy is also an Associate Librarian with the National Library Board. Paddy was a mentee of the 2014 Noise Music Mentorship programme.



Kamini Ramachandran is the creative force behind MoonShadowStories, The Storytelling Centre Ltd and StoryFest Singapore. A sought-after storytelling artist and devoted teaching artist, she has travelled the world with her repertoire of stories. She is passionate about her craft and dedicated to the advancement of the art of storytelling. She also teaches at LASALLE College of the Arts, where she is an alumnus.



Han Sai Por is one of Asia's leading modern sculptors. She has participated in numerous international exhibitions around the world. Her works can be found in many international institutions, public spaces and private collections in Singapore, Malaysia, India, China, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. She was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 1995.

Next Steps

The Arts and Culture Employment Study (ACES) helps provide a better understanding of the working conditions, motivations, challenges, and professional development needs of arts and cultural professionals in Singapore. These findings enable NAC to prioritise employment and training issues that need to be addressed.

NAC recognises the need to nurture the next generation of arts professionals who can contribute to the development, vibrancy and evolution of Singapore's arts and cultural sector and has been investing in this through schemes, programmes and the provision of resources. They include the NAC Arts Scholarships, the capability development grant, as well as residencies, mentorships, fellowships, courses and workshops. Many of these happen in collaboration with industry partners here and overseas and cover a range of topics. Besides programmes that grow the artistic practice of arts professionals, there are also programmes on leadership development, technical theatre, fundraising, creative producing and pedagogy, to name a few.

Moving ahead, NAC will continue these efforts and look into how freelancers, which make up a significant proportion of the arts workforce in Singapore, can be better supported in the long term so that they can sustain their careers and contributions in the arts. NAC will also continue to refine ACES for future iterations of the study.

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