

Senator Thorpe has placed the following questions on notice to the Flying Fruit Fly Circus:

**1. After all of this high-skilled and long-term training, where do graduates go to with their skills to find employment?**

a. How many graduates stay within the circus industry actually performing?

In 2023, 7 students graduated from the Flying Fruit Fly Circus. 2 have gone straight into freelance performing, and 5 have gone on to Tertiary Circus studies (2 at NICA and 3 at the Ecole du Cirque du Quebec).

Over the last 10 years approximately 70% of our graduates go on to further circus study or into the industry as performers. Currently there are 7 recent graduates employed at Cirque du Soleil, 2 at Circa in Brisbane, and 4 in regular employment either freelance or in the traditional circuses. Drawing a longer bow, FFFC alumni have and still do populate almost every major circus company in the world, as well as founding their own successful companies.

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b. What are the challenges for graduates to find performing work?

There are a number of career pathways for our graduates;

1. Secure a contract, or training opportunity that leads to a contract, with Cirque du Soleil. Our new partnership with Cirque du Soleil means that we are able to put our graduates in front of the casting directors. They are currently looking for talent in Teeterboard, Tramp Wall and Hoop diving, very specific acrobatic disciplines.
2. Secure a contract with the two Australian companies that currently maintain ensembles of a significant size (Gravity and Other Myths in Adelaide, and Circa in Brisbane). Both these companies mostly employ multiskilled but very acrobatic artists and prize ensemble and group acrobatics skill.
3. Maintain solo or duo acts (often a ground based act like hula hoops or juggle, and an aerial, handstand or contortion act) and 'sell' to the various variety style shows like Strut 'n Fret's *Limbo*, *Blanc du Blanc*, or Highwire Entertainment's *Rouge*. These shows are successful at Fringe Festivals and commercial touring circuits. Traditional Circuses also look for artists in solo's or duos that can provide multiple acts.
4. Join an emerging or established smaller scale ensemble show or company like Casus, Briefs, One Fell Swoop, A Good Catch.
5. Create your own show with a group or small ensemble and 'sell' to the market. This can look like self-funding a showcase season at the various Australian Fringe Festivals, or in an international context, going to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This is very expensive and artists rarely recover costs for a venture like this although a successful season at Edinburgh can bring in international interest and bookings.

**2. Is it possible to get full time employment in performing circus in this country?**

a. How many jobs are there in performing circus in Australia?

There are currently 2 companies in Australia that maintain significant ensembles of circus performers. Circa in Brisbane has a full time ensemble of about 30 performers, as has Gravity and Other Myths, based in Adelaide. There are other stables of performers in smaller groups that don't

necessarily have full time contracts but are paid when there is work. Some of these, like the Briefs Factory, are very successful and can offer almost full time work to about 7 performers.

Theatre Network Australia surveyed the sector in 2023 and found the following;

**Circus and Physical Theatre Artist**

A survey by TNA of the Australian sector in 2023 found 370 Circus Artists employed by Australian companies.

**Circus Trainer**

492 Circus Trainers are employed by Australian companies in a 2023 survey by TNA.

**Entertainment Rigger**

351entertainment riggers are employed by Australian companies in a 2023 survey by TNA.

Less recently;

**Street Performer**

In 2017 there were 2,000 active busking permit holders in the City of Melbourne, while the City of Sydney reported 1,500 total permits and an average of 500 buskers working each week. The 2019 Buskers by the Lake Festival in Queensland received over 700 applications and showcased more than 300 performers

- b. What are the biggest challenges for circus performers to find work in Australia?

Maintenance of skills at a high level requires access to properly equipped spaces and ongoing regular training. There are some spaces, like the Flying Fruit Fly Circus headquarters in Albury, that welcome artists (including but not limited to ex students) and provide access to the training space for free. Most places that have space will charge rent or access fees.

Circus performers need to showcase their skills and artistry to demonstrate their employability. This can be expensive (see discussion re challenges for graduates finding work), and Fringe seasons or international market exposure rarely recovers costs.

3. **Do you think it is easier for circus graduates to find performing work overseas? If so:**

- a. Why is that?

Cirque du Soleil currently employs 1300 artists. Flying Fruit Fly Circus has a new partnership with Cirque called NexGen. We are one of only 6 training organisations in the world in this partnership which is designed to identify and develop talent in the skill areas appropriate for the current Cirque touring and resident shows.

In Europe there are Festivals and producing theatres that are completely dedicated to circus arts, for eg. The Festival in Auch, France, and the Chameleon Theatre in Berlin. Australian circus artists are found in many companies and ensembles all over the world, and Australian ensembles such as Circa, Company 2, Casus and others regularly tour internationally.

It is probably true to say that circus is considered more seriously as an artform in Europe than in Australia, where it more thought of as entertainment, and arts funding is often more substantial. France is a good example, investing €4.2 billion in arts and culture in 2023.

Full time jobs in the Australian contemporary or traditional circuses are highly sought after and firmly held onto once conferred.

- b. Does that cause a drain on our circus performers here?

Cirque du Soleil contracts are highly sought after – secure work, good conditions, competitive wages! This means that Cirque can take their pick of the best new talent on offer. This means in turn, that the Australian sector loses those performers and their capacity to innovate and develop the artform.

**4. How could the circus sector in Australia be better supported to create more performing opportunities?**

Strong training institutions with world class facilities are the bedrock of the sector and need to be sustainably supported. This is the model that has worked so successfully in Canada, in Montreal. Flexible and well resourced touring grants will help to ensure artists and companies can find audiences for the work they create, and regional Australia can share in the benefits of high quality work.

**5. Do you think Australia values its circus arts to the same extent as it is appreciated overseas?**

- a. How do you see the support for circus here compared to the support for other art forms?

Please see answer 3 above.

- b. Is the support adequate?

Support for the arts here is not as substantial as in some other countries, and contemporary circus as a comparatively new artform often struggles, not even listed as a category in funding applications. As one example, the FFFC's multi year funding agreement with Creative Victoria has barely increased in a decade (almost no arts funding is index linked), and so it's like a slow withering on the vine, with expectations to always do more, but with less and less money.

**6. How could the National Cultural Policy address these shortcomings?**

The success of Revive will ultimately be judged terms of a real dial change in how we value arts and culture, and materially support our creative industries.

The cultural and creative industries are one of the world's most rapidly growing economic sectors, globally providing 50 million jobs and generating revenue of \$2 trillion. And yet, many secondary schools barely acknowledge tertiary education and professional career pathways in arts related disciplines. Our western education system is not designed to nurture the innate creative impulses of children and young people. It rather trivializes artistic pursuit.

A paradigm shift is required. Schools need to change their perspective and promote cultural and creative pathways with the same enthusiasm as any other. Young people should be made aware

from an early age that these are legitimate choices that can lead to a rewarding career and a rich fulfilling life. These are 'proper jobs.'

And governments at all levels need to embrace the social and dollar value of the creative economy, understanding that they invest in the arts, for a real return, rather simply give hand outs to 'worthy projects'.

Creativity should be Australia's most valued commodity. It is our most exciting potential area of growth. This National Cultural Policy should, at its very heart, address the intrinsic worth of creative education and arts training. Young people are the future of our cultural health as a nation and the organisations that guide and inspire them are the pipeline.

***"GDP measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile."***

*Robert F. Kennedy*