Mentor Mentee

A creative relationship

University of South Australia

guildhouse

The Ian Potter Foundation

A research evaluation of Guildhouse's mentorship programs

Report Author
Susan Luckman

Project Team
UniSA: Jane Andrew, Stephanie Taylor (Open University, UK), Verity Reeves, Tracy Crisp
Guildhouse: Emma Fey, Debbie Pryor, Victoria Bowes, Ayesha Aggarwal

Other Contributors and Acknowledgments
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This research would not have been possible without the generous support of all the interviewees. We are incredibly grateful for your honesty, insights and time. The information and experiences you have shared offer invaluable insights into why the mentoring relationship is such a precious and important one across creative sectors, and into ways in which it can potentially be strengthened even further.

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[Overall the most rewarding part of the program was just the] feeling of achievement, feeling of self-worth, and feeling of a greater confidence in what I do.

Catapult Mentee

Brianna Speight
Skin & stone #4
2018
Photograph courtesy the artist.

Building stronger creative mentorship

→
Laura Wills

You and Me
2017

Photograph courtesy the artist.

↓
Emma Fey

Photographer: Rosina Possingham

Guildhouse has a long history of artistic career development. The organisation's origin as the Crafts Council of South Australia in the 1960s was deeply rooted in professionalising practice and skill development. Now, as South Australia's peak body for independent visual artists, craftspeople and designers, Guildhouse is a national leader in artistic professional development, supporting over 1,000 artists through programs and initiatives.

The Guildhouse Catapult program is an artist-led mentoring program launched in 2018 with support from the Ian Potter Foundation. Catapult encourages ambition, providing flexible opportunities for funded mentorships for artists at all stages of their career. Catapult purposefully encourages participation from culturally diverse and regional artists.

This partnered research study, conducted by the University of South Australia, was always envisaged as a critical element of the Guildhouse Catapult mentorship program. With the support of the Ian Potter Foundation, Catapult funds artists and their mentors to work together for a period of up to nine months, addressing clearly identified goals. Catapult builds on many years of mentorship initiatives delivered by Guildhouse, each evolving to meet the changing needs of the artistic community. Previous mentorships programs have always included evaluation and self-reflection; however, Catapult presented an important opportunity to thoughtfully examine why artists gravitate towards mentorships as a primary form of career development, conditions for success, and the long-term impacts.

This interim research report produced by UniSA presents the findings of in-depth research interviews with the 2018/19 Catapult participants, as well as a cross-section of mentors and mentees involved in Guildhouse programs since 2000. We are particularly interested in the impact of mentorships on artistic career development over time, to document what we hear anecdotally from practitioners. We sought to address a gap in published research, documenting the value of mentorships over time, and ensuring this knowledge can be shared and leveraged nationally to strengthen the sector's capacity.

We acknowledge the generosity and leadership of the Ian Potter Foundation for their support, and the partnership and professionalism of Professor Susan Luckman and other staff at the University of South Australia for their stewardship of this important research. Many artists and associated participants in this program have dedicated considerable time to this study, and I thank them for their insights and commitment.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the University of South Australia's Researcher Connection Innovation Fund and its support to publish this interim report at this important juncture.

Emma Fey
Chief Executive Officer
Guildhouse

Role modelling is just so important in society and so when you can role model behind someone that you admire and they can mentor you, the outcomes are just amazing.

Catapult Mentee

I believe in my own artwork but I wasn't sure if other people did. And it just felt good that [my mentor] did … he just put this ground of confidence under me; the right to go from strength to strength.

Fran Callen

It's advanced my practice because it's advanced me.

Jane Skeer

Foreword:
Building Stronger Creative Mentorships VI

Executive Summary 2

The Guildhouse
Catapult Mentorship Model 4

Project Aims and Methods 6

Literature Review:
What Does Research Say About Creative Mentorships 8

Participant Demographics 10

Perceived Barriers to Career Development 12

Mentorship Logistics and Experience 18

The 'Five Phases of Mentoring' 22

Mentees' Perspectives on the Value and Benefit of Mentoring 26

Was the Mentorship Mutually Beneficial? 36

What Makes a Good Mentee and Mentor? 40

Did the Mentoring Experience Encourage the
Participants to Mentor Others? 48

Mentoring and Finding the Right Balance 50

The Most Challenging and Rewarding Aspects
of the Program 52

References 54

This interim report offers some initial findings from a research-informed evaluation of Guildhouse's new three-year Catapult mentorship program as well as its various mentorship programs of the last decade. The project's aim is to examine the impact of mentorships on artistic careers over time.

The key research questions guiding the study are: what were the outcomes of previous Guildhouse mentorship programs, and how can the learnings from these be incorporated into improving future programs for both mentors and mentees? This research fills an important gap in existing knowledge for, despite the centrality of mentorship – formal and informal – to the development of creative careers globally and across time, not to mention the significant financial and human resources invested in formal mentorship programs globally, surprisingly little research has been undertaken into their conduct and efficacy.

This project consists of two primary activities: semi-structured interviews with mentees and mentors who have participated in Guildhouse (and formerly Craft South) mentorship programs from 2000 to 2019 about their experience of the program and its outcomes, and semi-structured interviews with current and future Guildhouse Catapult program mentors and mentees. The first of these activities is now completed, so too the first 6-month-out interviews of Catapult participants from the first program intake. So far this has resulted in a total of 39 recorded and professionally transcribed interviews: 17 with mentors (9 previous program and 6 current Catapult participants) and 22 with mentees (15 previous program and 7 current Catapult participants).

In identifying the barriers to pursuing a creative career that mentees seek advice on overcoming within the context of mentorship programs and relationships, unsurprisingly 'cash flow' emerged as the greatest challenge identified by all cohorts of both mentors and mentees. Notably however, within the more recent Catapult cohort, the shift to needing to embrace a more entrepreneurial business approach to developing one's creative practice, alongside declining numbers of galleries and other retail spaces (at least in some areas of artistic practice) and the defunding of key peak national bodies, is evident in the fact that equal to 'cash flow' as a barrier are 'avenues to sell work' (mentees), 'marketing and promotion' (mentors) and 'professional networks' (mentors).

What emerges in the study thus far is the value of a strongly scaffolded program, particularly at the beginning and end stages of the formal mentorship. This was notably important in not only facilitating the connections between mentors and mentees, but doing much of the work of clarifying expectations, including targets that might stretch the mentee (and mentor) but not be too unrealistic. This was important to establishing a trusting relationship, which most respondents considered essential in a successful mentoring partnership.

Even though what they ended up getting out of it may not have been what they intended, the overwhelming majority of mentees found the experience 'valuable', with over 77% finding it 'invaluable'. Similarly, most mentees responded that the mentorship would have career-long value and impacts, often working as a pivotal turning point in their career.

… the overwhelming majority of mentees found the mentorship 'valuable', with over 77% finding it 'invaluable'.

One of the outstanding unintended consequences was the confidence boost of being taken seriously by peers, represented by both getting the mentorship and then having supportive access to a respected colleague. This confidence boost could then unlock all sorts of possibilities beyond the life of the formal mentorship. Most mentees we spoke to still benefit from strategic professional endorsement from their mentor, even beyond the life of the formal program. Mentors too spoke of valuing the strong sense of reciprocity underpinning the relationship. Most saw it as a collaboration among peers, ideally with opportunity and space for mutual learnings and creative renewal; almost all mentors spoke of the strong sense of obligation they felt to give back to the creative community, with mentoring seen as an essential part of giving thanks for the support and advice they had received themselves as they built their careers.

The Guildhouse Catapult Mentorship Model

Mentorship takes many forms, spanning various degrees of formality, structure, time and outcomes. The Catapult model has emerged out of many years of different mentorship initiatives developed by Guildhouse, responding to the needs of the artistic community and broader arts sector.

Catapult mentorships are artist led. Artists identify their goals for development in a specific area of their practice, whether that be artistic skills or professional practice, such as business development, networking, communication and documentation. The mentorship can involve local, national or international mentors, and can span a period of up to nine months. Some mentorships are enacted over an intensive period of time or stretched over a longer period with studio visits, regular meetings and emails.

Artists can apply for the Guildhouse Catapult program through an annual application process. The Guildhouse Artistic programs team work closely with applicants to refine their goals and support their choice of mentors. In some instances, Guildhouse will assist to pair a mentee with a mentor, but in most cases, the focus is on supporting and enabling artists to be ambitious and stretch themselves in contacting their mentor and establishing early rapport. Mentors might be other artists; in some instances they have been professionals from other sectors and industries. Funding is provided to fund both the mentee's and the mentor's time at either $5,000 or $10,000. $10,000 opportunities have been awarded to mid-career/established artists and usually involve significant travel.

The mentorship itself is structured around the initial goals. The mentor and mentee together refine their plan to work together, using Guildhouse as a sounding board if there are any issues. A mid-way report from the mentee and mentor provides insights into learnings and provides an opportunity for reflection.

The Catapult program is not oriented around an outcome of new work or exhibition. However, in many instances, the mentorship encompasses a period of creation or a specific project and has a direct impact on the development of new work. This provides a powerful opportunity to celebrate learning and accomplishments, in turn feeding into new creative developments. In many instances, the mentee and mentor go on to maintain an active dialogue in a more informal way, as mentor, advocates, collaborators, and industry peers.

The Catapult program encourages participation from regional artists, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse artists.

1 Identify

- Artists identify goals and possible mentors
- Artists approach mentors (with Guildhouse support)
- Artists apply and are selected for Catapult program

2 Engagement

- Reconfirm goals and mentorship structure
- Regular check-ins with Guildhouse staff to ensure the communication and support between mentor and mentee allows for goals to be reached
- Mentorship under way (travel, meetings, studio visits, etc)

3 Review

- Workshop ideas with Guildhouse staff and connect with other skilled practitioners if needed
- Pause and reflect on goals, feedback, progress together – share with Guildhouse
- Continue to refine
- Define final chapter of mentorship

4 Completion

- Final check-in with Guildhouse staff to ensure goals were met and to identify additional opportunities to leverage the Catapult experience, eg. funding, introductions

5 Evaluate

- Brief mentorship report provided to Guildhouse
- Participate in Guildhouse/UniSA study via interview
- Contribute to online survey 1 year later

Project aims & methods

This project is an extension of the work done by the UniSA Creative research team through the Australian Research Council three-year funded project 'Promoting the making self in the creative microeconomy' (the 'Crafting Self' project). As part of their funding request to the Ian Potter Foundation, Guildhouse approached UniSA to undertake an independent, research-informed study of both previous Guildhouse, and before that Craft South, mentorship programs, as well as the three years of the Catapult program funded by the Ian Potter Foundation. The brief was to examine the impact of mentorships on artistic careers over time, and to provide feedback to enhance future programs for both mentors and mentees.

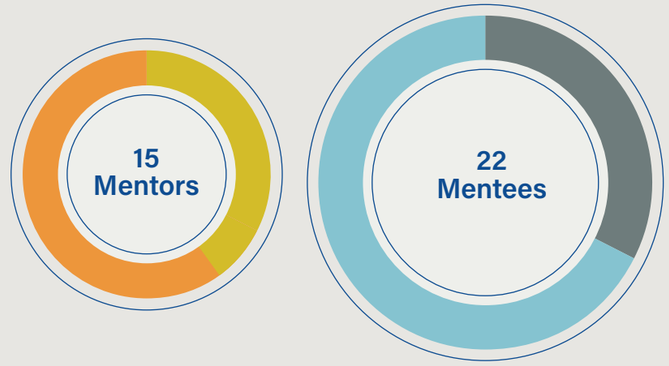
What clearly emerged during the Crafting Self project was the importance of ensuring that the education, training and support offered to Australia's arts, craft and design students, graduates and practitioners accurately reflects the complex mix of practice and business skills required to succeed in the contemporary creative economy. Drawing upon findings from this initial project, we developed a suite of qualitative and quantitative semi-structured interview feedback tools that have been employed in interviews thus far with mentees and mentors drawn from both the first iteration of the Catapult program and the various precursor programs over the last decade or so (hence the use of Catapult and Pre-2018 to delineate the two sets of data in this interim report).

These interviews commenced in October 2019 and the last of the first tranche was completed in early March 2020, just before the impacts of COVID-19 became particularly serious in Australia. Funding for this interim report has been provided by the University of South Australia's Researcher Connection Innovation Fund established in April 2020 to ensure researchers and the community remain in contact, despite the many challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, including limits on (large) gatherings. This interim report presents the early project findings, which were to be otherwise shared at the cancelled public event 'Catapult Mentorship Research Panel discussion and insights' (5–8 pm, 8 April 2020).

In the current climate, artists, designers and craftspeople, like others facing the retraction of their employment, are looking to use this time to re- and up-skill. In this context, teaching and mentoring work is one of the few income streams still open to many, as learning and skills development are sought by others. In a changed and tighter economic market, understanding key sites for skills and business development

Total interviews completed

37 interviews



Pre-2018 mentors	9
Catapult Year 1 mentors	6
Pre-2018 mentees	15
Catapult Year 1 mentees	7

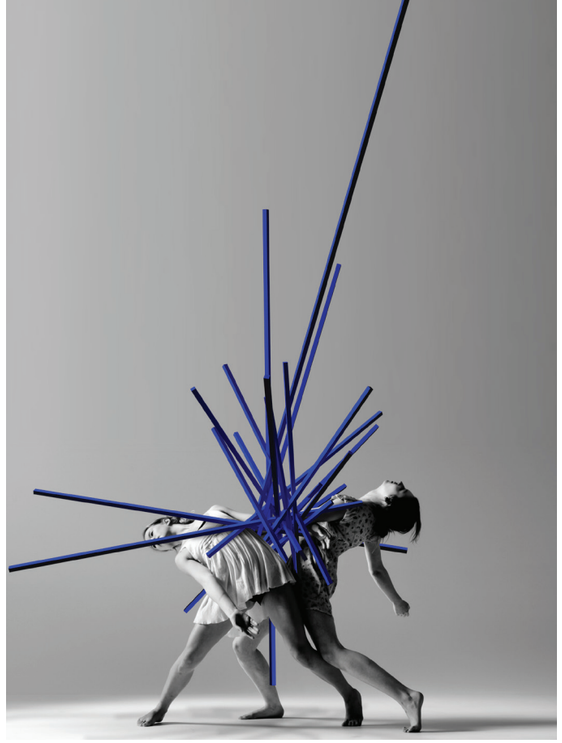
We are extremely grateful to the following people for their generous involvement in the research project:

	Mentors	Mentees
Pre-2018	Roy Ananda, Stephen Bowers, Greg Healey, Deb Jones, Naomi Schwarz, Lex Stobie, Catherine Truman, Laura Wills.	John Blines, Fran Callen, Dave Court, Louise Flaherty, Stephanie Fuller, Mandi Glynn-Jones, Gail Hocking, Naomi Hunter, Kath Inglis, Rebecca McEwan, Geoff Mitchell, Annalise Rees, Eleanor Scicchitano, Vic Waclawik.
Catapult Year 1	Sasha Grbich, Darren O'Donnell, Regine Schwarzer, Johannes Sistermanns, Jess Wallace, Sera Waters.	Bridget Currie, Kaspar Schmidt Munn, Sandra Saunders, Jane Skeer, Lara Tilbrook, Christopher Williams.
	As well as the 3 participants who choose to remain anonymous.	

for creative workers is key to the sector's survival in Australia and around the world – hence the importance for us of sharing this valuable information in a written interim report, which is in addition to the report that will be publicly released upon completion of the project.

This three-year research project (2019–2021) consists of two primary activities. The first is semi-structured interviews with mentees and mentors who have participated in Guildhouse (and formerly Craft South) mentorship programs over the last decade about their experience of the program and its outcomes. The second activity is follow-up semi-structured interviews with current and future Guildhouse Catapult program mentors and mentees, 6 months and then again 12 months after program completion. The first of these activities is now completed, so too the first 6-month-out interviews of Catapult participants.

What does the research say about creative mentorships?



Tom Borgas

Hyperobject Movement 1
2019

Photograph courtesy the artist.

The short answer to this question is that, despite the centrality of mentorship – formal and informal – to the development of creative practice globally and across time, not to mention the significant financial and human resources invested in formal mentorship programs globally, surprisingly little research has been undertaken into their conduct and efficacy. While the funding mechanisms supporting many formal programs require some basic evaluation in the form of participant feedback, this information tends to remain within the organisation and to focus on the specifics of that program, rather than delving deeply into the experience of mentorship on a broader level. It also tends to take a shorter and/or quantitative (tick box or Likert scale) form rather than the rich data generated through interview discussion. For these reasons, Guildhouse were especially generous not only in opening up their program for independent evaluation, but in sharing these findings with the wider community. This is also a timely intervention, enabling the generation of findings that are already of growing interest to other arts, cultural and creative organisations locally, nationally and globally.

While there is not much existent research specifically dealing with artistic/creative mentorship, there is a sizeable body of writing and policy that discusses best practice mentorship in other contexts, especially businesses and other large organisations. There are also bodies of work primarily dedicated to specific types of mentorships, quite often around inclusion, such as offender rehabilitation and people with disabilities. There doesn't seem to be much at all around career development.

The most significant piece of research specifically on arts mentorships we found is the 2010 QUT Master's thesis by Joon-Yee Kwok: *When sparks fly: developing formal mentoring programs for the career development of young and emerging artists.* This is an important piece of work and one this project is indebted to.

Among its key findings, Kwok's research notes:

Most mentoring research comes from the corporate world, with principles generally adapted from the corporate world (which may not be relevant in the creative context).

Mentoring functions on two key levels: career and psychosocial support.

It is important to understand the life cycle of a mentoring relationship – initiation, development, maturity, disengagement, redefinition – and especially to pay attention to the final two, as 'achieving closure has been noted by the literature as critical to a program's success' (p.14).

Mentors and mentees can be matched through a process of 'matchmaking' by program managers or self-selected by mentees. There is some suggestion that programs are more successful when there has been freedom in the choice by the mentee.

There has been a movement towards mentorships as a two-way relationship (away from the hierarchical model) and it is intended that both parties are working as equals.

Different national contexts have different models. In the US, mentors act more as advocates and sponsors; in Europe there is a stronger emphasis on mutual learning and on the psychosocial benefits.

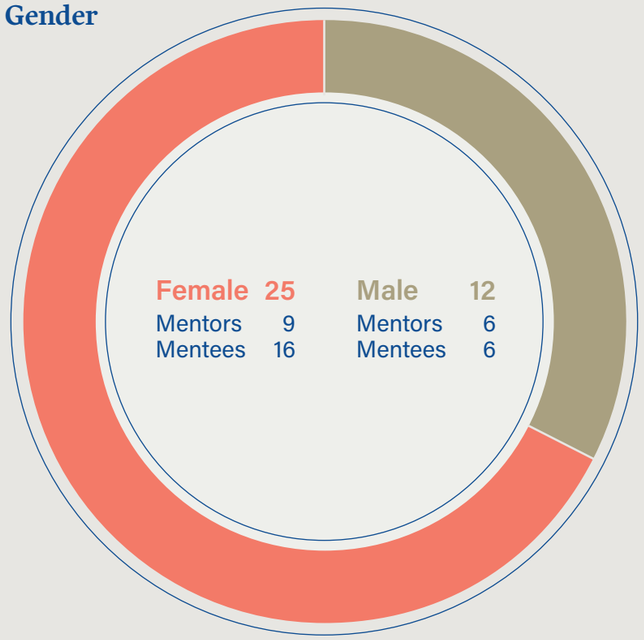
There must be opportunities for induction and training in the process of mentoring, and these inductions or training sessions should be given to both mentors and mentees (eg explaining the mentoring life cycle, having introduction sessions with presentations by previous participants) and should include careful articulation of roles and responsibilities.

Sera Waters

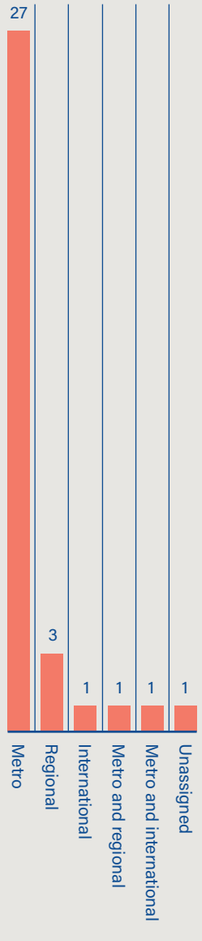
Blindspot
2019

Photographer: Grant Hancock

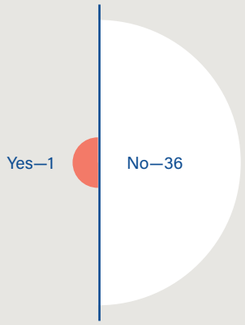
Gender



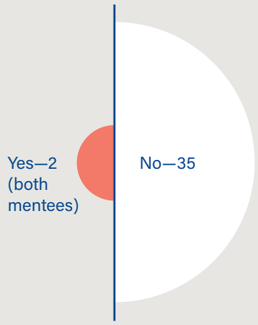
Location
Where were you based for the period of the mentorship?



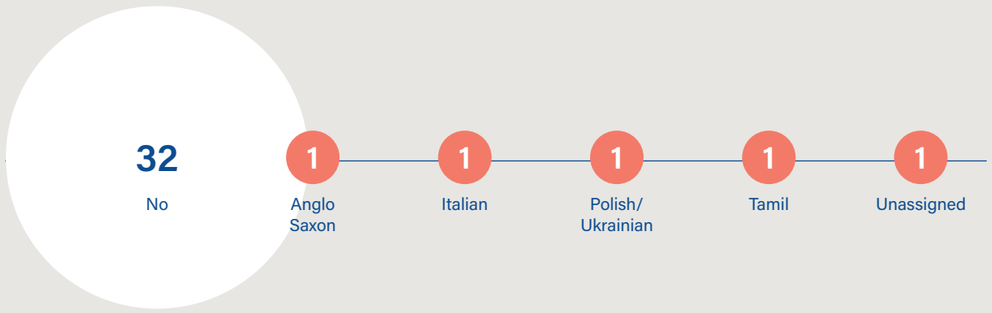
Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?



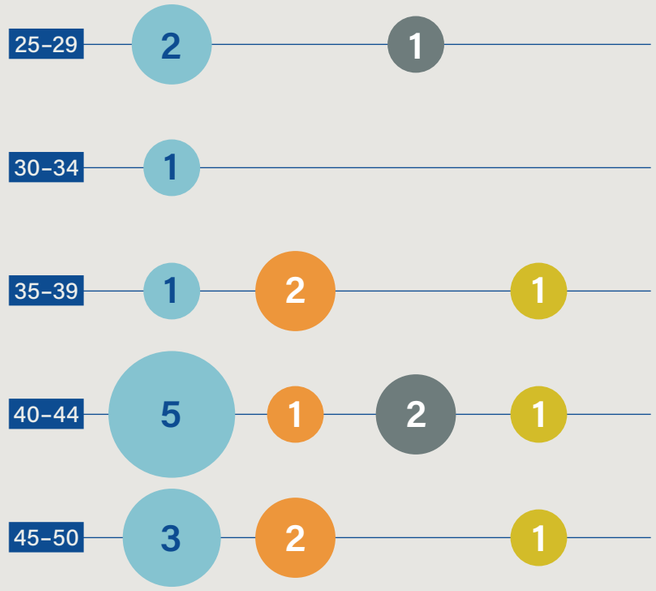
Do you identify as a person with a disability?



Do you identify with a specific ethnic or cultural group?



Age—at time of interview



NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Pre-2018 mentees	15
Pre-2018 mentors	9
Catapult Year 1 mentees	6
Catapult	6

Perceived barriers to career development

When both mentors and mentees were asked to comment upon what they perceived as the barriers to career development in their field (and which, hopefully, mentors can at least partly help them potentially overcome), their comments reflected much of what we already know about the realities of making a living as an artist or other creative practitioner today. Since the late 1990s, across the global north we have witnessed the rise of what has been referred to as portfolio work. Portfolio work involves simultaneously working on a variety of projects in different places of employment (or self-employment); in this way, the 'individual becomes his or her own enterprise, sometimes presiding over two separate companies at the one time' (McRobbie 2016, p.20). Tepper (2002) observes that many who work in the creative industries have multitrack portfolio careers – for example, our research participants included designer makers who also teach, produce works for exhibition, create limited-run production ranges, undertake public art commissions, and design for manufacture. Hall (1996) described this process as the protean career: 'a career that is driven by the person, not the organization, and that will be reinvented by the person from time to time, as the person and environment change' (p.8). Our 'Crafting Self' conversations with Australian craftspeople and designer makers did indeed confirm that most need to pursue a portfolio career to generate workable incomes; they also highlighted the passion that drives many makers to persist balancing these multiple roles (Luckman & Andrew 2020).

All this can lead to tremendous income precarity for artists and other creative workers, as has been acknowledged in numerous studies focusing on the generally low incomes of the Australian creative sector (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017; Throsby & Zednik 2010). One of these studies estimated that approximately 81 per cent of all artists are not 'salaried employees.' (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017, p. 88)

So in our study it was not surprising to see 'cash flow' emerge consistently as the greatest career barrier perceived by both mentors and mentees, and across both interview cohorts.

↑ Gail Hocking

Presenting *peripheral disturbance*, 2018

Photographer: Flinders University Museum of Art

→ Gail Hocking

A precarious resilience 2020

Photographer: Grant Hancock

simply the need to make money is one big barrier to professional growth because in order to make money in this field, one of the deals is it's very difficult to produce a new work. Always people are producing new works so I must tour works in order to, like I have, one work must make a bunch of money over the course of many years for this thing to be sustainable and so often I'm on projects that I've done many, many times and I would rather be making something new but I'd rather be eating than making something new. I need to eat to do any of this so that's, I would say that's a problem.

Catapult Mentor

When asked to identify the value and role of creative mentorships, a few mentor participants identified the difficulties around making the shift from art school to commercial/professional artists as a key point in one's career when greater support is required:

Well, I think the purpose is that in visual art practice you're often post-art school quite isolated. If you were just working in a studio and you are often looking to artists who have paved the way before you and thinking, how did they do that, and just needing that support and advice, so I think it's another, it's a way of offering support to artists who are emerging, or regional in this case, who don't necessarily have access to artists that have done that work already.

Sera Waters

In the creative arts, and particularly visual art, I think there's a big culture shock from finishing art school, and then being out in the wider world practising. So, I think things like mentorships are good, like [they] ease that passage.

Roy Ananda

Fran Callen & Chris Orchard

At Chris's studio 2016

Photographer: Aise Dillon

Certainly, for many mentees, regardless of their career stage, a key hope for their mentorship is to learn from mentors how to sustain a creative business as a reliable primary or sole income. However where this income is presumed to potentially come from has shifted notably in recent times. This again reflects wider research around arts and culture, including the shift from 'cultural policy' to 'creative industries', within which the arts are reinvented as a driver of innovation and economic growth, rather than a sector in need of public funding.

It's a whole different field to learn about business as well as your arts practice, just making things. They used to be taught within courses peripherally but it's largely learnt, again self-driven, but you still need some expertise and advice.

Pre-2018 Mentee

Q: Marketing and promotion?

A: Definitely a barrier, yeah. Getting work noticed is increasingly difficult, you know? There are a lot of galleries closing down at the moment and probably more, more so with the events that are going on now.

Geoff Mitchell

For all the great things about Adelaide, there are limited exhibition opportunities. We punch above our weight for our size, but it's still – you know, you can exhaust those galleries that are suited to you quite quickly.

Roy Ananda

In our findings there is a palpable shift in how both mentees and mentors relate to the commercial sector. In the Catapult results on barriers to career development, on equal footing with 'cash flow' are 'avenues to sell work', 'marketing and promotion' and 'professional networks'. This reflects both a more entrepreneurial mindset perhaps, as well as the reality of the loss of funding to many of the key national professional support organisations and artist-run initiatives.

In the most recent Catapult cohort we can see evidence that younger or at least newer entrants to, and players within, the contemporary creative scene are more likely to presume the need to be more commercially focused (even if they don't like it or don't feel very good at it), while more established people who have been in the sector for a while have perhaps benefitted from historically greater levels of public funding for creative work.

It is important too to acknowledge the differentially experienced impact of family responsibilities upon being able to fully realise a creative career, and this is evident in our findings here too:

Yes, I don't have really much family in Adelaide. So, I find that's my biggest ... you know, yes, it would be nice to have more income, but at the end of the day, [my biggest challenge is] trying to manage a child and then have my practice.

Pre-2018 Mentor

[Family], definitely, I've got to tick that because I've got my kids and their school, kindy and stuff, it comes first to me now. So it's like, they've got 'joeys' after school or piano lessons or swimming or whatever it is, the things they're interested in, that they want to do. I'm going to put that first rather than an exhibition opening or a playdate that, for me that comes first. And so I don't get to many openings or talks or art events at the moment and I feel like that means I don't get as many opportunities [to network].

Pre-2018 Mentor

BB Shoemaker

In her workshop 2014

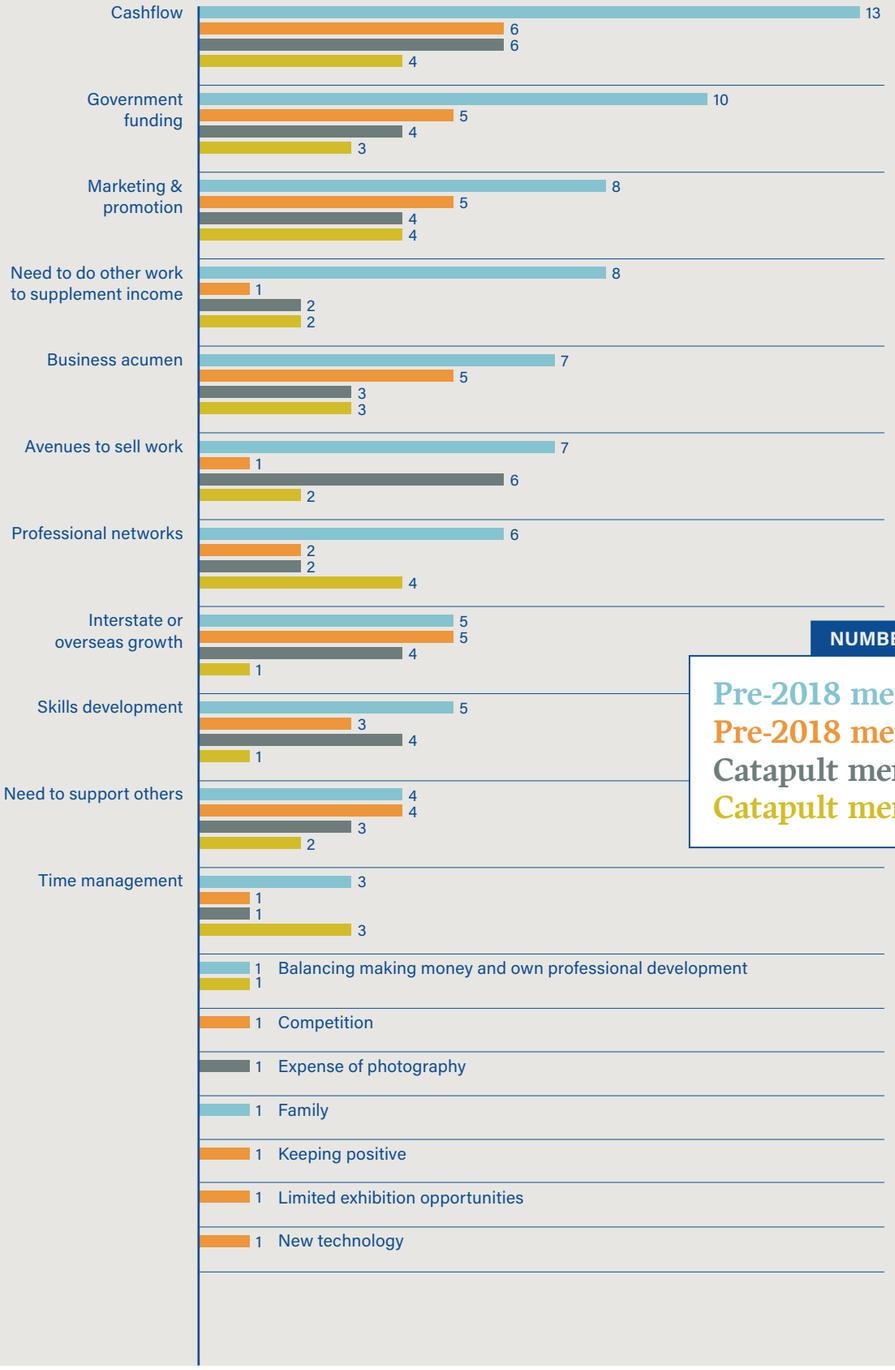
Photographer: Aise Dillon

There is increasing awareness that the frequently unclear, informal and network-based work practices underpinning much employment in the creative industries are effectively operating as a barrier to gender, ethnic, class and wider social inclusion, resulting in profound impacts upon the content of cultural production. Evidence indicates women 'fare better in settings in which there is both greater formality to the hiring process and greater transparency' (Conor, Gill & Taylor 2015, p. 11); therefore the informal networks through which opportunities are secured in the creative sector can reinforce existing inequalities.

Creative labour markets are often defined by processes of 'network sociality' (Wittel 2001): 'In such "reputation economies" wherever you go, whoever you meet, represents a work opportunity. "Life is a pitch".' (Conor, Gill & Taylor 2015, p. 10). Working almost exclusively with those you know or who are vouched for by people you know may be seen as an essential means by which to mitigate risk in a sector where returns are rarely guaranteed. This homosocial reproduction or homophily (Ibarra 1992; Leung, Gill & Randle 2015; Wreyford 2015) importantly still means that 'members of the dominant group replicate themselves' by seeing 'people like themselves as the most trustworthy and competent' (Jones & Pringle 2015, p. 39). This perpetuates the exclusion of other social networks and groups from this sphere of creative production.

The following figures show the participants' responses to the question

What do you perceive as barriers (if any) to the continuing development of your creative career?



[Mentoring is] kind of [like] food, it's nutrients. I love it. I really love it. It gives meaning to my work, definitely gives meaning to my practice.

Pre-2018 Mentor

[It gave me] me a lot more confidence in my practice given that I was quite a new grad. That I can engage with places like that and also Guildhouse on a professional level and they would support me as an emerging artist.

Pre-2018 Mentee

Irianna Kanellopoulou

Tra lala lala
2010

Photograph courtesy the artist.

Mentorship logistics and experience

A number of the questions in the interviews with mentees and mentors addressed some of the more technical aspects of the mentorship experience: everything from how people were paired together, whether there was a prior relationship, as well as expectations and goals for the experience, through to more detailed information regarding what mechanisms were used to facilitate contact and how many hours were involved. This part of the interview yielded too much detail to usefully go into in this interim report. But what it did clearly reveal was that, unsurprisingly, each relationship is as different as the people constituting it.

What did we do? [...] We did studio visits where I would go to his studio, and he came to mine, and so we looked at what the practice was, what tools we were using, what materials we were using, what kind of space we had, what kind of lights we worked under. Did we work at day? Did we work at night? How did you fit it in and what was the timetabling like? Where did you get your raw materials from? What's the lead-time on that? You know, where are you going with all this work? What is the ergonomics of what you're doing? Is there any repetitive strain that comes into this? Is there a problem with the way you're sitting, or the seats that you use? Like all that sort of stuff, it's just basic stuff. And then we also had meetings where we literally weren't looking at anything to do directly with his work, but more his ideas, and we discussed other artists, and we discussed social cultural history of visual arts and the way it overlapped with craft, its development, historical, world-wide, global, and we looked at the exchange of those things. We looked at the way techniques had developed.

Pre-2018 Mentor

In keeping with this, the contact and working methods used tended to be fairly diverse and based on both expediency and personal preferences, as well as the phase of the mentorship (and nature and intensity of work within it at that time), and the specifics of the creative practice itself and how people tend to work within it.

What clearly emerged from the interviews is the value of a strongly scaffolded program that has been refined from experience and feedback from previous programs, particularly at the beginning and end stages of the formal mentorship. This was notably important in not only facilitating the connections between mentors and mentees, but doing much of the work of clarifying expectations, including targets that might stretch the mentee (and mentor) but not be too unrealistic.

[I]t was a really simple process to apply for and really easy to structure and we had a timetable and an hours and budget which was not arduous to apply for or to report to. It was very simple and straightforward. So that made it really clear what the outcomes and the objectives were and it was great that there was no kind of push for a big objective because it just helped you to relax and enjoy the experience without feeling that pressure. As an artist, I feel there's this constant pressure to produce and that can become quite stressful to the point where you're not producing because it creates this anxiety or this, you're almost like a stunned rabbit in the spotlight having to churn out something. So I think it's really good to have these opportunities where there isn't a desired outcome but, and now when I look back in hindsight, I see, wow, I have outcomes from that project, I have a solo show that I'm working towards, I've just been asked to be in a portfolio that will be held in the Art Gallery of South Australia Collection, I'm told there's a few curators watching me and I've just been included in this show with some other very prominent artists [...], so for me that is amazing.

Catapult Mentee

So we did do quite a bit of negotiation because I felt like right at the beginning she had kind of unrealistic expectations of what I could offer as a mentor so, for example, getting her gallery representation, [so] we had a discussion back and forth and came to a point we both felt happy with which was me mentoring her to be true to her practice and kind of grow the areas that she already had strengths in and contacts, people she could aim proposals to or seek opportunities with.

Catapult Mentor

So I had to create timelines and I had to then measure what was happening, my success or failure levels, with what I was doing. And then she would encourage me to go off in yet another direction that I hadn't thought about. So it was very, very helpful.

Pre-2018 Mentee

Many of our participants identified that this solid framework was of central importance to their experience. They valued the arm's length way it facilitates the mentorship pairing and forces mentees and mentors to clearly articulate and formalise their aims and, to an extent, how they will manage the mentorship process. They suggested that this structure is an essential ingredient in creating a sense of trust, and a secure trusting relationship (one where no question is too stupid, where people can speak freely). For some this trust came as a result of a positive prior relationship, even if it had been not been particularly strong; others found themselves able to build the necessary rapport within the scaffolded space provided by the formal mentorship relationship.

3 months is not enough time. 6 months, maybe a year, is perfect and because it takes time to unfold the history of someone to know where their head and for the mentor and the mentee that's a, that can be a slow process. [...] You have to really be open to the individual to start with and that can take a bit of time.

Pre-2018 Mentor

Initially it's like fishing, for both of us and also it's necessary to respond, to allow enough time for them to reflect on the session and respond to it and then come back to the next session [...] So it's really incremental and it's really, it's something that you can't control from the beginning. You must let it just, it has to be organic.

Pre-2018 Mentor

Because I work alone all the time and somebody seeing how I work and what I do and worrying about whether I'm good enough, because I'm always worried that I'm not good enough, and so if you have a personal, comfortable relationship with someone then you let down those barriers you hold up to protect yourself, and you feel so much more comfortable to ask the questions that you dare to ask and to take their advice without taking it as any type of sarcasm.

Pre-2018 Mentor

Tamara Hardman, Thomas Smeets & Bridget Currie

At Holy Roller Studios
2018

Photograph courtesy of Guildhouse.

↑ Leonie Westbrook works-in-progress
2019

Photographer: Rosina Possingham

→ Leonie Westbrook and Catherine Truman at Gray Street Workshop
2019

Photographer: Rosina Possingham

I think it for me it was important to have at least met the person I wanted to approach to – because someone could be a very promising pairing on paper but yeah, I think you do have to have met them to just gauge whether they are a person that you may get along with. I obviously believe that and still do because now I do have a professional relationship with my mentor even though the mentorship has long finished. [...] my mentor opened my big exhibition, which was early this year, so it's almost ongoing then. [...] But I definitely found that the case for me and I got on really well and then felt comfortable asking silly questions and I think that's where the value in the mentorship lies. Because, I mean, if you could find the things you want to find out from a book you would not need the mentorship. So yeah, I think that real interpersonal connection facilities you getting to the true core value of the mentorship.

Pre-2018 Mentee

I think being able to build a rapport with the mentor is important, because of you're in a vulnerable position so you need to feel that you're able to trust the person, as well as speak to them quite honestly, and that, in return, so I think building that rapport is really important, or feeling that there's a possibility to build a rapport is important.

Pre-2018 Mentee

The issue of trust will recur throughout this report, and some partnerings will always be more successful than others. However, what has emerged in the study thus far is that the support for the initial stages of mentorship and for closure offered by the facilitating organisation (in this instance Guildhouse/Craft South), as well as the scope for checking in during the mentorship, are essential scaffolding that is valued by the mentors and mentees as they individually and collectively navigate their way through the mentorship journey.

The five phases of mentoring

It has been suggested that the mentoring relationship goes through five phases.

Bottomley, 2015

1 Contemplation

Deciding to enter or participate in a program

2 Initiation

Introductions
Defining goals
Setting boundaries

3 Growth & Maintenance

Development and maturation of the relationship

4 Decline & Dissolution

Negotiating the end of the formal relationship.

5 Redefinition

Moving forward positively with clear expectations, one way or another.

James Dodd

Mill Painting (Orange & Purple)
2018

Photograph courtesy the artist.

Most people were not consciously aware of it at the time but in retrospect felt that they effectively moved through all five phases across the course of their mentorship relationship. Most found the 'contemplation' and 'initiation' stages relatively easy given they were mediated by the structuring of the process offered by Guildhouse through its application process. The only complexity noted at this stage concerned people who knew one another and who had to re-negotiate that relationship within the context of the formal mentorship program, both at its beginning and end:

> Even though we knew each other quite well, that initial period can be a bit tricky because you're just getting used to actually working with someone that closely.
>
> Deb Jones

> Like there was a clear, defined end to the mentorship. However, because we have a friendship he was still willing to do a favour for me in opening my exhibition so [we are] moving forward positively but with clear boundaries and expectations as the mentorship had a pretty defined final session and conclusion. But he did offer to, you know, made a gesture and offered don't be afraid to ask things in future.
>
> Pre-2018 Mentee

For others, doing the perhaps hard work of laying clear foundations and expectations for the relationship up front paid off in terms of having an agreed framework for closing off the formal mentorship:

> Q: I suppose if you don't do this there was no real distinct re-definition of the relationship?
>
> A: No, we sort of figured things out but it was all quite positive. I think in the beginning to figure it out because as I said we are both quite strong willed and we had quite clear ideas how we thought it should be going so we needed to negotiate a little bit around it and I wanted to set some steps as well, how I think it needs to go for me, and then you have a bit of a structure how we go about it.
>
> Catapult Mentor

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the stage that garnered the most comment was the one likely to be most recent in time – Stage 5:

I remember having at the last kind of meeting, under the mentorship, I remember sort of saying to [mentee], like you know, while I'm happy to write support letters or if you want me to cast an eye over an artist statement, feel free to do that, so sort of extending that invitation. But yes, there's sort of this cut-off point, but it's not like you're dead to me ... So I suppose that's the only time I probably consciously thought about any of those things.

Pre-2018 Mentor

For some, formal closure never actually came, leading to mostly positive ongoing relationships and extensions of people's networks:

I expect that he would be part of my professional circles ongoing and that relationship is still alive. [...] So we didn't shut it down or discuss how it now moves, it just was that now we're colleagues who know of each other and if we can figure out a way to work together, because we got along quite well.

Catapult Mentor

We just had that project at the Botanic Gardens. Well, she just happened to be at the State Herbarium starting there, doing a project at the same time. And it kind of felt like another little mentorship because we kept meeting up and discussing what we were both doing. It was a new thing for both of us and so I'm like, 'Oh, come and have a look what I've just found', and then talking about how microscopes work and light again and, so it just felt very natural for both of us just to pick up again. It was – it felt like another mentorship.

Kath Inglis

Kath Inglis

Inglis at the opening of her exhibition of *uncertain value* at the Santos Museum of Economic Botany as part of The Collections Project 2019

Photographer: Daniel Marks

← Edward Hayter and Caren Ellis 2016

Photographer: Aise Dillon

Negotiating the end of the formal [mentoring relationship], well, you know, that was easy to do, because we just had to say, 'Oh, shit it's over. We've got to write those damned reports and send the images in', you know, which we did. ... And then we just kept going. Redefinition, moving forward, positive and clear expectations, one or another. Well yeah, I mean I definitely think we moved forward. I'm not sure about the clear expectations, but there were expectations. How clear they are, because it's all dependent on circumstances.

Pre-2018 Mentor

It's a natural course of events, all those that happen. You may renegotiate a new mentoring relationship under new conditions, depending on the needs of the person ... The roles reverse and with people I mentor that happens as well, roles reverse. They're going to decline when you've got space from each other, but then you come across each other, usually in some other relationship. I mean just recently in Melbourne where there was a huge amount of jewellers there, a lot of which I'd worked with and they come up to you and tell you their story, it happens all over again. What are you doing? What are you doing now? And they, you can tell they're looking for my approval or not, but I just ask more questions. They ask more questions of me and the relationship never ends. It never ends really.

Pre-2018 Mentor

For still some others, the loss of the formal mentoring relationship hit them perhaps harder than they expected, for with it came the loss of easy and sanctioned access to a valued sounding board that they had come to rely upon:

So I did probably fall into a bit of a slump at the end of it all. It was just [...] because the contract had run out I didn't feel like I could ring him all the time and everything with the same sort of questions. So you do go through this time where you just feel like having that person again. [I] wished it was still going so I could ask him this.

Catapult Mentee

For those in the midst of their mentoring relationship, negotiating closure or, more accurately, re-negotiating the relationship, was the stage they were most likely to think about when prompted to reflect on their experience.

Mentee's perspective on the value and venefit of mentoring

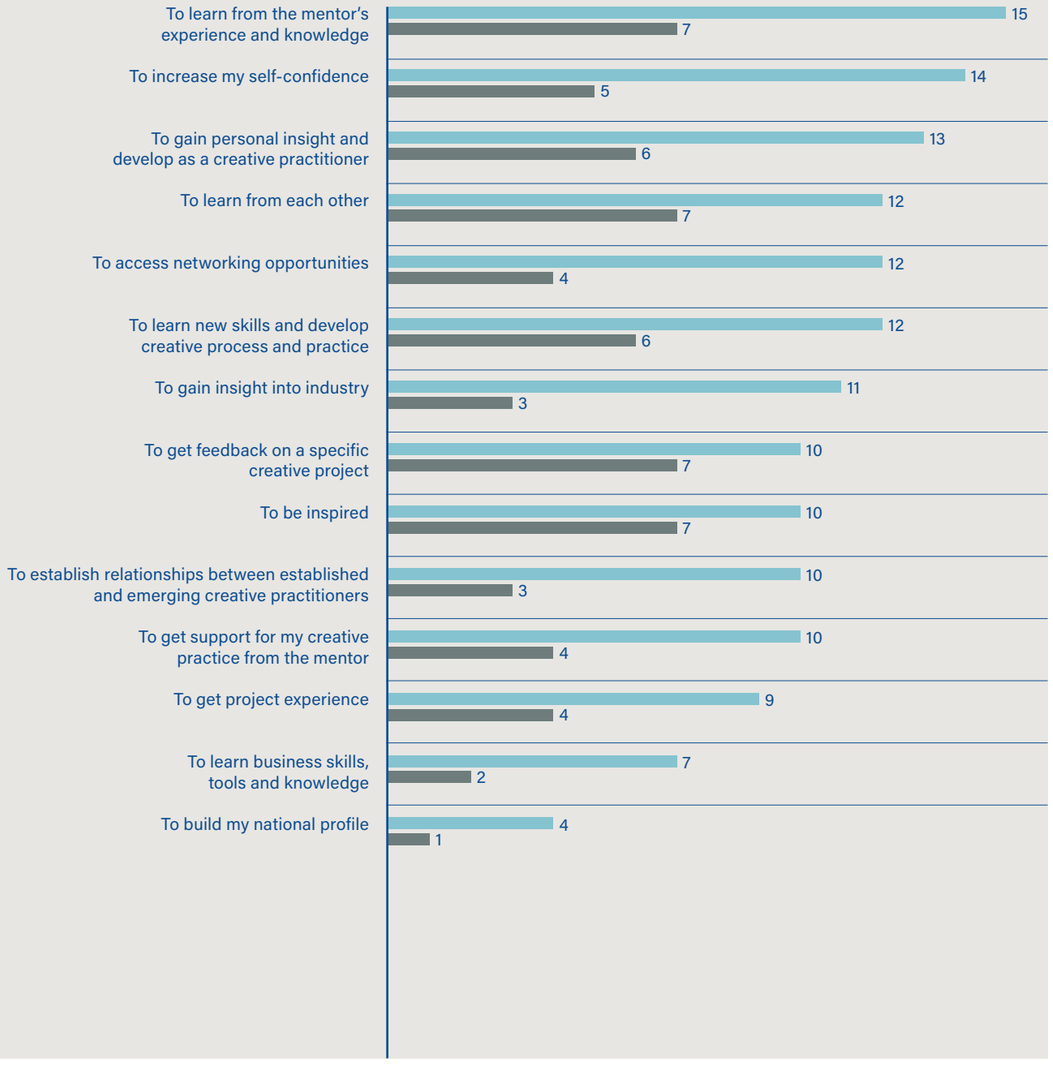
Goals

NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Pre-2018 mentees	15
Catapult mentees	7

We asked the mentees

What did you hope to gain from participating in the mentoring program? Please choose as many as you see as appropriate.



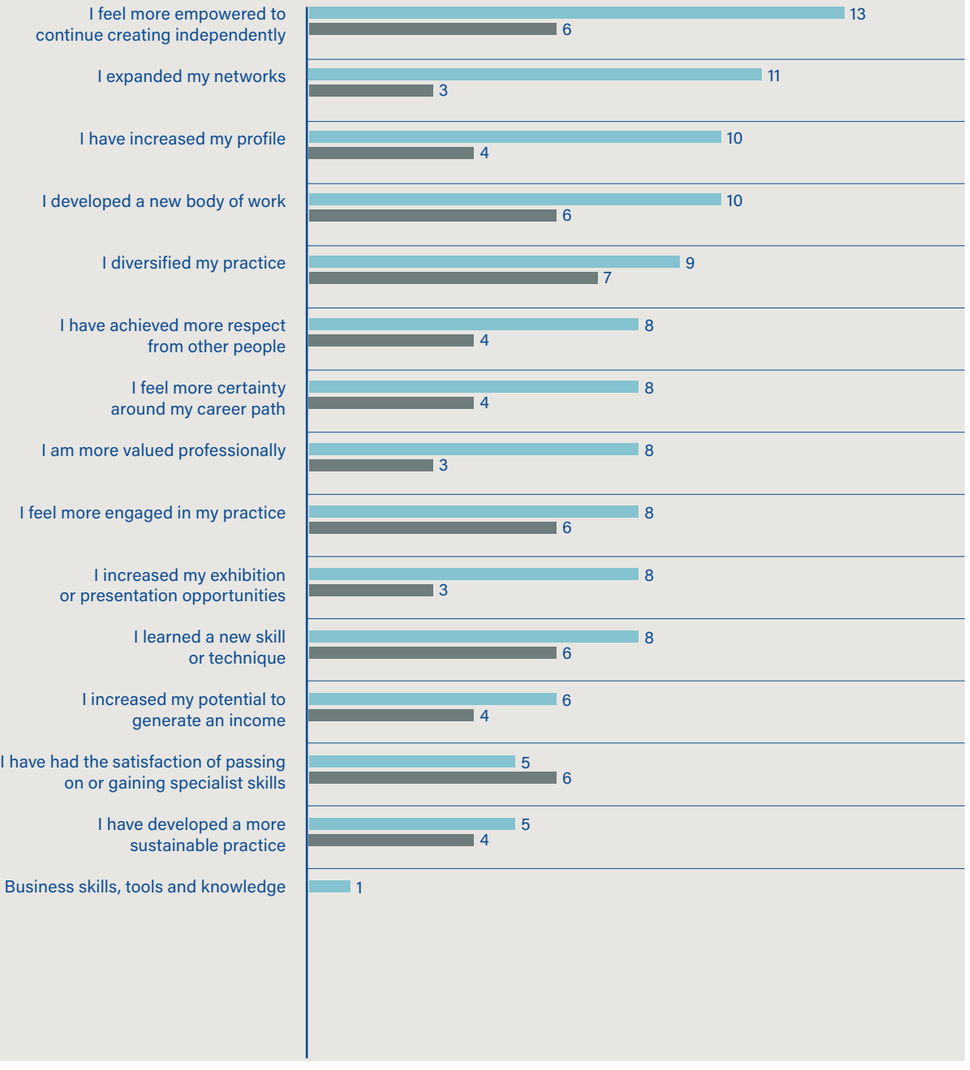
Outcomes

NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Pre-2018 mentees	15
Catapult mentees	7

We also asked the mentees

In practice, what would you say were the most significant gains from the mentorship?



Sera Waters

In her studio
2016

Photographer:
Deidre
But-Husaim

[It's important to recognise] just how valuable mentoring is for artists. It really sustains and propels careers further and I think without it artists, particularly at that emerging stage, you see more artists fall away because it's very hard to sustain it when you're not getting that positive feedback. So it offers support and it, I know for myself it enabled me to keep going and that's the reason I am here still as an artist today.

Sera Waters

In comparing the goals and outcomes nominated by the mentees, it is important to situate the experience in terms of the mentees' career stage. Some mentees were just starting out at the time of their mentorship:

I guess the unexpected gains are that I've gained both a mentor and a friend and colleague. So, just the fact that that went far beyond the formal mentorship relationship. So, that was something that I didn't anticipate. I was just developing confidence as a young practitioner. So even though that's not necessarily easy to quantify, that self-belief [that the mentorship gave me] was really important. [...] just really useful, pragmatic information in terms of projects and different types of opportunities, developing an understanding of what those different types of opportunities would bring to a practice. [...] The mentorship, I guess provided [the support that I needed] in a more official structure that the whole focus of it was exactly for that, and so it was a much more targeted way of developing, rather than relying on the goodwill of others to share information, and even though that is particularly strong within the arts community. But I think the fact that it's formalised, it enables the mentee to be much more directed about what it is that they want to do, and how they want to go about. I guess using a mentorship, it presents a finite period of time to be able to develop a relationship for a particular purpose. So, I think that the information is out there, but it can take a lot longer to find the right people to speak to, and can take a lot more groundwork for the mentee, and especially as an emerging artist that you don't necessarily have those networks to really know exactly who to speak to, so it takes much longer, just over years to develop the same kind of level of information that a mentor can pass to you in what might be a six- or twelve-month period, so it's much more concentrated, and that way you can put that information into action much faster.

Pre-2018 Mentee

However most mentees and mentors identified themselves as 'mid-career', with some mentors feeling comfortable identifying as 'successful and established.' Mentorships are relevant at all stages of a career, and certainly the mentees we spoke with were coming to their mentorship experience from various stages of their career, as is evident in the age profile of program participants. Few were early-career practitioners straight out of university. Mentorships then were often sought to provide a 'next step' in a career journey, rather than to set it up:

[Value,] just being able to make this major new work in a really different way than I would normally work. [...] I mean, yes, I could have asked people to work with me that were filmmakers or made a collaboration and something will have come out of it but I felt like I just really wasn't prepared, I just really didn't know how to begin. So yeah, in that way I really feel like it was a really important part of what happened.

Catapult Mentee

[The mentorship helped me] to simplify what I do. Looking at designing differently, simplifying design [...] it's helped me to streamline some of my designs aesthetically and mechanically.

Catapult Mentee

Different mentorships fulfilled different purposes depending on career stage:

I'm a contemporary jeweller. I've had two mentorships. The first one was when I was an emerging artist, so quite different from the second one which was Pre-2018s later where I was a more established maker and that one, I was after more conceptual development. So the first one was, the emerging one, was just kind of really reflecting on what I had done in the first five years as a professional artist and where I was going to go next and looking at areas of my practice where I could improve and just a broad overview really. Whereas the second one was more targeted to conceptual development.

Kath Inglis

Sasha Grbich and
Christopher Williams
2016

Photograph: Aise Dillon

This may take the form of seeking support to learn a new skill, or take their practice into a new area:

[I'm] mid-career, it was really just a chance for me to expand my skills and knowledge in one particular area that I really knew I didn't have any idea about.

Catapult Mentee

A cross-disciplinary mentorship enabled an artist to look at their own practice through the lens of another and thus anew:

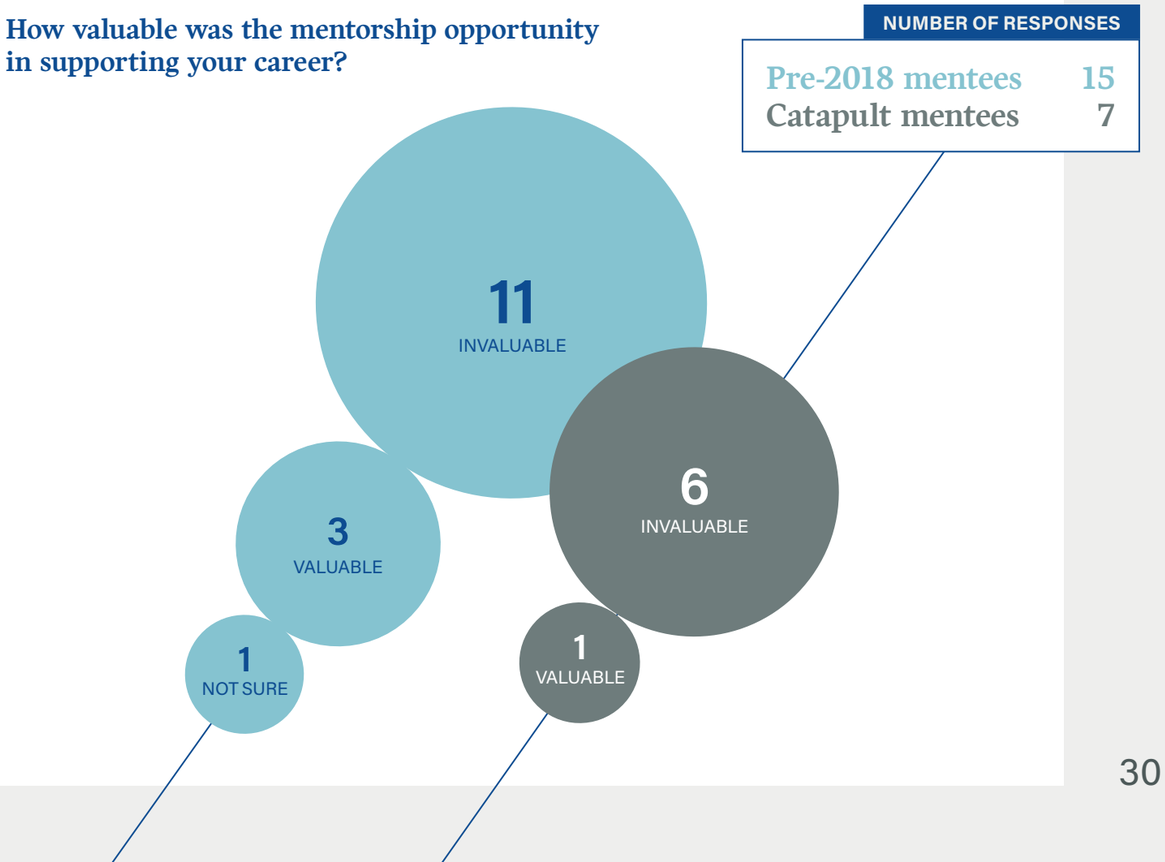
[The experience has helped my practice by] giving me a bit of a visual library to reflect on in my work and just helping me articulate my work and my practice a bit more clearly and the confidence I guess, to step out of, just seeking information through an arts circle and expanding where I do my research and giving me the confidence to step out of my comfort zone, I guess.

Rebecca McEwan

For others, even if their professional practice was not new per se, it does have to be acknowledged that the aim was to 'get a foot in the door'. So it was not so much about how to establish oneself as a creative artist, but rather how to start making money from having done so. As we saw earlier, one of the key career barriers both mentees and mentors identified was the challenge of maintaining 'cash flow'; hence many mentees sought to gain insights from mentors, some but not all of whom are able themselves to generate a full-time income from their creative practice, into how they might be able to do so themselves.

The following figures show mentees' responses to the question:

How valuable was the mentorship opportunity in supporting your career?



What consistently emerged, for both early and mid-career mentees, was the importance of the mentorship in boosting their confidence. It provided a licence either to take themselves seriously as professional artists or practitioners (especially for earlier career mentees), or to explore new skills or professional areas (mid-career mentees). With creative practice being subject to constant subjective judgement, unclear and precarious employment pathways, under-funding, under-employment, and often unclear or inaccessible gatekeepers, the confidence imparted by someone you respect giving over some of their time to support and encourage you to take your practice to the next step cannot be overstated. Arguably, beyond all else, this personal boost was recognised as a key take-away by mentees and was one of the reasons why the experience was generally seen as so pivotal, with long-term positive impacts.

It was very important [...] it wasn't just about the transference of information, it was much more about, well equally as importantly about developing networks, but really as a young emerging artist, it was incredibly positive in terms of the confidence that it helped me develop in being able to speak to – you know, initially a stranger, and have some confidence in what I was doing, and thinking that that was of interest to someone else, and also, an established practitioner. [...] there was also, on a much more foundational level, I guess, development of mutual respect, which was incredibly important, because the dynamic of the mentorship, of the mentor really becoming a colleague and being, for myself being an emerging artist, being treated so that my interests and ideas and what I was wanting to do was just as valid as someone who was well into their career, and so that kind of, that mutual, that respect that flowed back from the mentor was incredibly affirming. [...] finding someone that you can share your ideas and thinking with, and who was genuinely interested and excited and wants to talk about those things with you, that's probably the number one, and from that, of course, it's incredibly affirming and builds that sense of self-confidence, and then of course there's all the more practical information, of course, which is incredibly useful and you use that in an ongoing kind of fashion.

Pre-2018 Mentee

I think the mentorship has done more for me than I could have ever imagined and it's really just given me that validation or the acknowledgement from a very prominent contemporary peer that I admire that my work is good [...] And it's really just as simple as that, actually having a chance to workshop some of those ideas and just getting that acknowledgement. I think because we're all individual artists and we're always doubting and second-guessing ourselves because we're pushing new boundaries and creating things that have never been seen before, so to have support with that or guidance with that, it's just – especially when you're working independently, not in a combined studio or workshop – that, yeah, is just amazing support.

Catapult Mentee

I think it really helped me in my confidence to apply for other things. Naomi Hunter

Well, confidence was a big [unexpected gain]. I guess I was expecting that a bit but I hadn't really thought it out in great detail, but it was definitely the important part of it, and the roll-on different opportunities leading out of it, and how much it's been helpful when I'm applying for something else. [My mentor now knows my stuff well and] and he knows me well enough to write a really convincing reference or whatever, which he's done a couple of times. [...] so it's nice to have someone have your back a bit. [...] I did sell some big artworks which I'd never done before at prices that I've never asked before, through being at that gallery [...] I sold bigger stuff for more than I've ever done before, because of it, and that's because of the mentorship. And I met a lady that continues to buy my stuff every now and again, which is really nice and big stuff. Fran Callen

There was something [invaluable] about the mentorship of having, what's the word, acknowledgement that you're kind of on the right path. Often as an artist, you're working on your own and you never know really, you're like, I'm doing this but is this, is this valuable or is it worthwhile? But to have someone from the outside to talk to but that also knows your work and knows the area, to able to validate what you're doing, I think was really important. Just to give you the confidence to [keep going]. Pre-2018 Mentee

I think [my mentee] is maybe just lacking confidence, so just looking for someone just to give her permission, in a way, to say, yes, go for it, you can do it. Catapult Mentor

When asked to consider where they are now in terms of their career and to what extent the mentoring program helped them get there, those with a bit more 'water under the bridge' since their mentorship experience had much more to say, having had more space to reflect upon what the experience meant for them and their careers. Like many other learning and planning-based experiences, the actual benefits can take a while to realise, have a long lead time, and are often best understood and appreciated in retrospect. Again, what we heard from many of these mentees was that the mentorship had played a lifelong and/or pivotal role in their personal and professional development. This includes the ongoing willingness of many mentors to assist former mentees by opening doors through opening exhibitions and writing endorsements for grant or gallery exhibition applications.

↓
Sandra Saunders
In her home
2019
Photographer:
Jess Wallace

→
Fran Callen with her son and Christopher Orchard
2018
Photographer:
Aise Dillon

It was really pivotal. I think without it I'd still be a submerged artist. And it did propel me to another level that I felt like, felt like I deserved but I wasn't quite sure how to get there. And just it did give me heaps of confidence and I won a couple of art awards [...] I do think it was a big turning point because then one thing led to another. [As my mentor said] said just strength to strength. Fran Callen

Q: How long do you expect the benefits of the mentorship to continue for you?

A: Oh, I think they'll just keep going. I think with a new skill like that, it'll, it's just something I can keep using. (Gail Hocking)

Q: Would you say it was a pivotal turning point in your career?

A: Absolutely, yes. Kath Inglis

There are things I've learnt that will take me through my career. Sandra Saunders

The opportunities I've had since then for exhibition and for the residency, that has had a great deal to do with not only with that mentorship, but the ongoing relationship with [my mentor]. [He] has supported me in those applications. Of course his name on the application means a great deal. And it's the same when it comes to approaching the gallery; if he talks to them beforehand or writes me a letter of introduction or whatever, you know, that is significant. Geoff Mitchell

Despite these positive career-long impacts, such focused and strategic support, feedback and advice, it was noted, are not easily replicable outside of the formal mentorship framework.

I don't think anyone without being paid would have gone into the level of depth and detail in looking at my writing. [...] I think that because the mentorship went over a bit of time there was a bit of comfort in me being okay with asking questions that might seem a bit silly but also comfort with him being able to say, 'This isn't a critique of you but I don't think this makes a lot of sense' or 'I don't think this sentence gives a lot of weight to what you're trying to achieve', and actually being able to give critique. [...] I definitely think that the kind of things that I got out of it were unique to the fact that it was a mentorship with goals and, you know, two people that are serious about striving towards something instead of just two friends having a chat. So I definitely think that it was key that it was a mentorship format specifically.

Pre 2018 Mentee

It is striking that nearly all mentees, even those who did not feel they achieved everything they hoped to, or for whom the experience was not always a positive one, still counted it as a valuable, if not invaluable, career-changing experience with lifelong positive impacts. This speaks to the persistence and longevity of the mentorship model, which has a long history in creative practice. The space to plan, reflect and receive critical, but supportive, peer feedback is in and of itself a positive one. Hitting barriers within such a context becomes part of the learning experience and professional growth curve of creatives. Indeed, the need to force oneself to confront challenges, with someone alongside to help trouble-shoot them with you, is perhaps an under-articulated but implicit reason why this model has persisted across time.

← Richard Lewer and Jane Skeer

In Richard's studio. Still from Catapult Mentorship Jane Skeer and Richard Lewer

Videographer: Ross Bird

↑ Simone Tippett and Lauren Simeoni

At Union St Printmakers, 2016

Photographer: Aise Dillon

Was the mentorship mutually beneficial?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, mentors were more likely to feel confident to respond 'yes' to this question and offer detail about how and why. Mentees, while on the whole fairly clear about what they were getting out of the relationship, felt less able to speak on behalf of their mentor on the degree of shared benefit.

At the heart of the mostly mutually beneficial nature of the experience was the way in which the relationship functioned as a two-way sharing of ideas and skills, as well as the way in which it created space in busy lives to reflect upon practice, career paths and the meaning of the work:

Q: Do you think that it was mutually beneficial for both you and for your mentor?

A: Yeah he, he said at the start he said, 'We'll learn from each other.' And he really was generous like that.

Pre-2018 Mentee

I learnt some very valuable things during that time. I took away from it certain experiences, learnt some new skills myself and developed a working relationship [that is] professional and personal.

Lex Stobie

I always think that, otherwise I'd get bored. It's like developing any relationship and we're both looking for the good in each other – and if you're both open a little bit and build on those bits, anything can happen and usually does. No, I really enjoy it and, particularly in this environment, it's fantastic to be able to have people come here and work.

Pre-2018 Mentor

This collaboration [was also] strengthening and pushing me a little bit further to work with my voice and in other [new] circumstances and to work in that space and to work with the megaphone and microphone. So this was pushing me, and I was profiting, benefitting from this.

Johannes Sistermanns

When I've mentored artists, it often makes me reassess what I'm doing with my own practice. It's great to often sit down and go through that 5-year plan. And you know, 1-year plan. Like, where would I like to see myself in the next year or whatever. And that's something that I often talk about when mentoring. To actually set some goals. And it, it does make me reassess what I'm doing.

Pre-2018 Mentor

[At a personal and professional level being this person's mentor] it's actually allowed me to see another way of being that's not so, I don't know, overwhelmed, time poor. [...] I've seen it open up as a kind of new pathway or a new avenue in my career, especially at the moment. [...] I really appreciate those people who looked out for me when I was an emerging artist and were there to help or write support letters or just, to be there to chat to, so I always made it my intention to try to do the same.

Sera Waters

But also sometimes it can be refreshing to hear what a younger person is thinking or doing and can be kind of exciting to kind of get into another generation's head. [It's valuable] just sort of knowing what's going on for young artists and listening to what they're talking about and thinking about and some of their problems. It's really quite interesting to know how that whole industry's operating and it's changed a lot for young glass blowers.

Deb Jones

Many mentors spoke about the mentorship not just providing the space for reflection and revisiting their own goals, but also offering fresh perspectives into their own practice; refreshing their own knowledge with new ideas. There was also a particularly strong sense of reciprocal obligation; of responsibility back to a community for all the support, advice, encouragement and mentoring that mentors themselves have benefitted from across their careers. This sense of generosity resonated through many of the interview discussions, in spite of the tight funding and competitive commercial spaces in which creative practitioners find themselves operating:

I guess going back to that thing of we're in a community and what comes around goes around and being a part of that whole cycle of things, and I think in a community that's good if you get involved, any community. And if you get in be generous and this was one way, one formal way to be generous in a million ways and it really is a very generous community.

Pre-2018 Mentor

But in particular with mentoring, the stuff that gets, that is drawn out of each person to form a new relationship is always exciting. And the stuff that I learn, I think about my own work very differently as a result [...] Everybody's mentoring each other at the moment. It's all new. There's a lot of cross-fertilisation.

Pre-2018 Mentee

That both mentees and mentors are frequently similar in age, with mentees often seeking out the mentorship not as professional entrants but as already established people keen to take their existing practice to the next level, or in a new direction, enables this mutual level of professional reciprocity:

Q: So do you think the mentorship was mutually beneficial?

A: Yeah, Catherine's spoken about it, too. In fact, she's like – she joked to me that she'd like to do a mentorship the other way around where I'm the mentor and she's the mentee and she thought it would be fun.

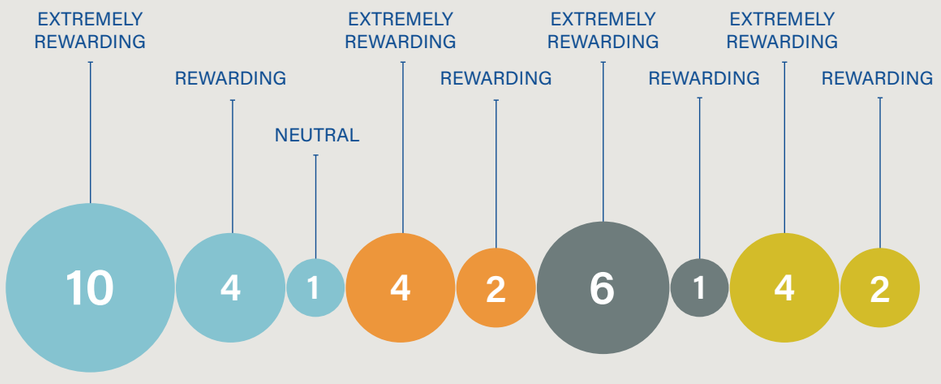
Kath Inglis

For those mentors more towards the end of their career, engaging in a mentorship program not only provided a mechanism to give back to the creative community, but also to share and hand on their skills; a form of succession planning and legacy building, keeping knowledges and experience alive.

NUMBER OF RESPONSES	
Pre-2018 mentees	15
Pre-2018 mentors	6
Catapult mentees	7
Catapult mentors	6

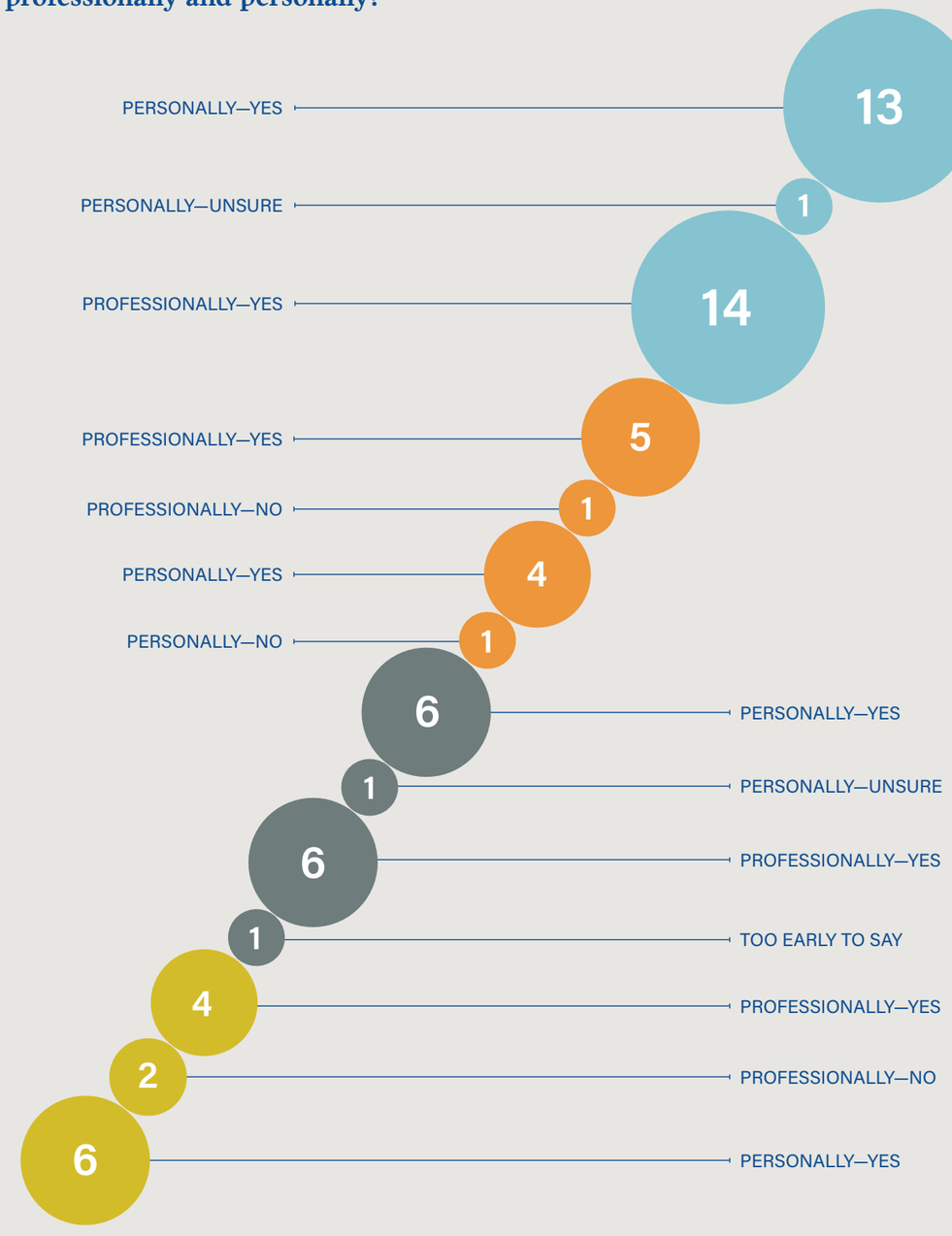
We asked both mentees and mentors:

How would you rate your experience?



We then asked the participants:

Did you find it valuable professionally and personally?



What makes a good mentee and a good mentor?

A good mentor, according to mentees

Someone who's a good listener. Someone who's willing to take the time to build a solid relationship based on mutual respect, that it's not only a hierarchical type of exchange. Someone who's aware of the vulnerability that mentees are in, but also themselves, I guess, and is willing to nurture and share, someone who wants to share. But also, I guess someone who's equally willing to receive and who understands that it is a reciprocal type of partnership. And of course, someone who has experience and knowledge, that's important too. [...] Just having someone who was unfamiliar with my work and outside of my peer group. I guess, if you like, coming out of university, to be able to talk about ideas and practice and have some new input and new thinking outside of my – at that stage – my established peer group.

Pre-2018 Mentee

I think that focus on peer-to-peer learning is really important, so I think try – not having a sort of hierarchy within the relationship, that it's much more of a peer-to-peer thing.

Catapult Mentee

Someone who is engaged, open, honest, willing to share, constructive.

Pre-2018 Mentee

A good mentor is someone that, I guess is like empathetic and understanding, and educational. And teaches you what you need to know at the point that you're at.

Dave Court

I think a mentor is someone who is willing to learn from you as much as you want to learn from them. Someone who can roll with the punches and isn't too rigid in what they do.

Pre-2018 Mentee

I think one of the things that makes a great teacher is curiosity; if you love the discipline that you're teaching then you can teach that love to your students.

Geoff Mitchell

They've got to be a giving personality as a person apart from their art practice.

Jane Skeer

Someone who asks the right questions; someone who is easy to trust; someone who can put others at ease.

Kath Inglis

A mentor needs to be flexible but also be able to keep the mentee on track because, while you get all excited as a mentee, you get off the subject and you can't drag yourself back to it sometimes because you're too naive about it all. So I think setting boundaries and perhaps getting the mentee to set defined goals right from the beginning.

Mandi Glynn-Jones

A good mentor, according to mentors

Somebody who is open and honest with the realities of what it takes to have an art practice. Somebody who also recognises or values the voice of the emerging artist that they're working with because I think sometimes people try to put their way of thinking about us or the world onto students, whereas it's more in this case about doing the best with that artist's voice and the direction that they're heading in and aiding them in that way. I think it's also someone who is willing to share their contacts and expertise and trusting that emerging artist is going to take that in their own direction and for their own benefit.

Sera Waters

Skill around distancing your own agenda from the situation, or your own interest, and also not expecting to know more than your mentee. [They] should be able to support and encourage and provide rigour and new skills that might get their mentee to a new and exciting place in their practice.

Catapult Mentor

Being open, a good listener, being astute, aware and compassionate.

Pre-2018 Mentor

A good mentor is to free yourself from your own work.

Johannes Sistermanns

Someone who is generous, whether it's with time or information. Someone who's accessible, so, someone who's there. Someone who's honest.

Pre-2018 Mentor

Someone who keeps focused on the idea that you're helping someone find their own voice, it's easy to kind of impose your own tastes and tendencies on people. So, yeah, I guess trying to stay conscious of that, that you're not trying to mould them in your image or anything like that.

Roy Ananda

A good mentor, according to mentors continued

Actually trying to listen to and help the mentee work out what it is they're trying to achieve and the best possible way to help them do that, I think. I reckon that's the main job is to be supportive of that process and for it – and to not be determined by the outcome necessarily, not to push your version of what you think should be happening. Not to suggest things, but to really try and work out the best way for the mentor to elicit from the mentee, if that makes sense.

Jess Wallace

Somebody who is [...] skilled in the actual, the discipline or the craft or the art that the mentorship is part of. I think it's important to have a mentor who has a little bit, not a huge, but a little bit of a reputation amongst his or her peers that he or she is actually recognised as an artist of merit, whatever that means. [...] having a mentor that is actually on the sort of forefront of their chosen discipline I think makes for a better outcome for a mentee because they're actually being exposed to new ideas and new approaches to working methodologies.

Greg Healey

Collegiality, I just find if there's a colleague-like vibe to it and it's much less hierarchical than it might be as a mentor/mentee. As soon as possible when I'm doing a mentorship with anybody or an internship with anybody, my preference is to just turn them into a colleague and give them a bunch of responsibility that they are able to handle and then just work with them. And then field questions and fill in the gaps if they have questions and make sure that they're doing alright.

Darren O'Donnell

Lex Stobie, Peter Harding and Åsa Jonasson

At George Street Studio, 2016

Photographer: Jonathan VDK

A good mentee, according to mentees

Someone who is willing to take advice and guidance onboard, but equally someone who has some direction in terms of what they'd like to achieve, because that helps to make the relationship as productive as possible.

Pre-2018 Mentee

Wanting to take on a challenge, that you can be honest with where you're up to with things or how you feel about things.

Pre-2018 Mentee

Someone that's willing to learn and eager and keen to absorb anything going on.

Dave Court

Someone who is willing to listen and think critically about what they're being told.

Pre-2018 Mentee

I think you have to really listen, to be able to have really good skills in taking [feedback] on board, because if you don't, then you're not going to learn.

Gail Hocking

Respect for the mentor and respect and curiosity for the craft of whatever they're engaged in.

Geoff Mitchell

Being involved, coming up with ideas, take some initiative. [...] Don't underestimate yourself as a mentee.

Kaspar Schmidt Munn

I think it's really important that you do the work in between the sessions. If I was to turn up after a month and I've got nothing to show, that would really make it just stall. You have to do the work as well, so staying on track with that is really important.

Kath Inglis

Just someone that's willing to learn, and accepts advice and support and guidance.

Catapult Mentee

Someone that's willing to listen and be flexible to a point as well because not being too rigid. [...] I found from both the mentorships that had I been really set on what I wanted from it, then I would have missed out on a whole pile of other stuff, so I guess being quite flexible to a point. You can't predict for how it's going to go really.

Rebecca McEwan

I think being open and understanding that there are tangible things that separate you from where you are at to the position [you want to be] at, and being understanding that they are probably going to tell you what they are – that can be difficult to stomach.

Pre-2018 Mentee

You've really got to listen, listen and make copious amounts of notes, copious. I mean go home and read them all and email, email your mentor back, not expect an instant result, but whenever you've got questions don't just wait for the next meeting but act upon it straight away. Because you get so much information given to you that you need to be able, you don't absorb it at the time. You need to go home and work on it and then write back about it and then hope that they can get back to you before the next meeting and then have a set of questions ready to ask them at the next meeting, because it's really, it goes really woolly otherwise.

Mandi Glynn-Jones

Fran Callen *Iggle Piggle sneaks out unnoticed*, 2017.
Photograph courtesy the artist.

A good mentee, according to mentors

I think she was really ready for it and I think that's key to a good mentorship, where somebody has a kind of set position or set of goals that they want to work towards and she was really keen and had been waiting for a while for that kind of opportunity.

Catapult Mentor

Somebody who is open to taking on advice. So some people ask for advice but then don't necessarily want to hear it, but again, it's their practice so they take it on in whichever way they can. Somebody who is respectful that they may be working with an artist whose time is precious, so they turn up on time and they do the things that they say they're going to do and are respectful in that way, and somebody who is eager, who has kind of been professional, to set aside the time that this mentorship's allowed and put in the energy that the mentor is also putting in so that when you do meet up, you're kind of progressing the conversation rather than going over the same territory.

Sera Waters

Clarity around what they want to get out of it [...] is this more based on technical skill or is it based more on conceptualisation, or is it based more on career development or things like that. So having a bit of a mission statement going into it.

Roy Ananda

Well someone who is keen, someone who's on time, someone who works hard, all the things we always look for in our associates. You know, we hardly ever by the end looked for skills because we could teach them skills and in fact that was our job, so what we were looking for was attitude, hardworking, was going to give it their all, that kind of thing.

Deb Jones

Somebody who's passionate, absolutely passionate and desires to learn and is committed and not fluffy and is not half-hearted about what they're doing. Is passionate and committed.

Greg Healey

Being clear about what they want but open enough to receive something different and being respectful, even if they don't quite see the point.

Catapult Mentor

Someone willing to challenge their assumptions about their practice or to move and grow. Someone who wouldn't, wouldn't make a good mentee is probably someone who just wants their vision affirmed or not looking to, to develop or, or challenge what they know.

Catapult Mentor

A good mentor, according to mentors continued

A good mentee never forgets that they have questions. They never forget that they are driven, that they become aware of what [they are driven by]. What makes them initiate this mentorship? This will be very important to have at hand for the mentee. And to be kind of generous to what they have not understood so far, even during the mentorship, and what they may never understand during this mentorship and even after this. [...] Follow things, follow something that you have never followed so far before. And to feel encouraged to go into risky areas for yourself, to embrace the unknown because the unknown is so far the unknown as long as you have not made an experience in these circumstances or in this particular area, which has been opened up through talking with each other or through practising with each other. So and be generous to words because a word is only a mirror of what is internally happening in a person and whatever we bring out is already expressed. It's already, before it's expressed, it's inside each artist already, living, existent, and it's there. And before it's in the artist, it's already, this is my perspective, it's already there in the world. So we are not really creating new things, we are simply actuating and actualising things which are already there. So this is – these are our intents and so this brings a very non-personal level in the very personal thing of our presence, the very personal presence of mentor and mentee.

Johannes Sistermanns

James Dean and Lisa King

In Lisa's studio
2016

Photographer: Jonathan VDK

← **Lorry Wedding-Marchioro and Dave Christopher**

2016

Photographer: Jonathan VDK

↑ **Bryan Tingey and Bill Doble**

2016

Photographer: Jonathan VDK

↓ **Louise Flaherty and Laura Wills**

Installing *Remembering Plants* at the Mill for the 2018 residency exhibition Memorial for *Forgotten Plants*.

Photographer: Daniel Marks

Did the mentoring experience encourage participants to mentor others?

Reinforcing the value of the mentoring experience to both mentees and mentors, as well as the strong sense of peer responsibility many creative practitioners feel towards their community, when asked if their experience had encouraged them to mentor others an overwhelming majority of both mentees and mentors responded positively.

I guess [it's] a responsibility that I have, because I've had many great mentors who have been incredibly generous and influential to me in my career, and so I see that as a way of giving back to ensure that other artists like myself have access to the same experience, because I've found it so incredibly beneficial. I see that as something that I've seen the benefit of so I'm obligated in a way. I feel quite strongly about that.

Pre-2018 Mentee

The sense of positive obligation, to repay by giving back to other creative artists the gifts of mentoring, advice and support they themselves have received, is palpable here. So too, especially in the 'already doing it' responses of mentors, is the reality that mentoring – both formal and informal – is an everyday part of many creative practitioners' taken-for-granted professional ways of operating. This was especially so for those working in collective spaces such as shared studios or other artist-run initiatives, or engaged in teaching as a means to support their practice as part of their portfolio careers.

Yes, and because people did that for me so I really appreciate those people who looked out for me when I was an emerging artist and were there to help or write support letters or just to be there to chat to, so I always made it my intention to try to do the same.

Sera Waters

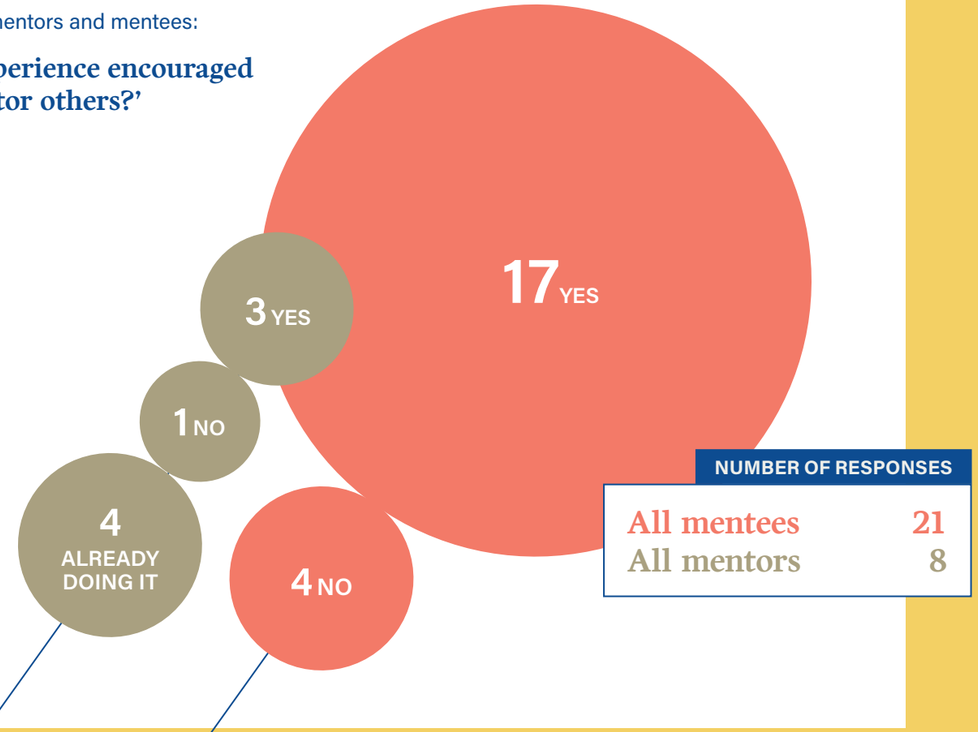
Fran Callen

At Chris Orchard's studio, 2016

Photographer: Aise Dillon

We asked the mentors and mentees:

'Has the experience encouraged you to mentor others?'



Mentoring and finding the right balance

What is so far emerging in this study is the importance of finding the right balance within a mentorship. Ideally the relationship should be friendly and comfortable enough to generate trust, but not so comfortable or unchallenging so as not to push the mentee at least a little beyond their comfort zone. This may seem an rather nebulous space to find and occupy, but the idea of being 'in the zone' is one that has been explored in a number of fields, including notably in terms of its importance to the realisation of creativity.

Kate O'Boyle *ecstasis*, 2017
Photographer: James Field

The famous Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi introduced us to the idea of 'flow' state. 'Flow' is a rare academic idea, one that has transcended the boundaries of scholarship to have a larger life in the world, largely on account of the way it resonates with the real, embodied experience of humans engaged in work they love. A flow state is one where we achieve an immersive state of balance between skill and challenge; time passes without us knowing as we are fully engaged in the task before us (Csikszentmihalyi 2008).

Creative practice and the exercise of tacit expertise of the artist and craftsperson have long been evoked when people look to understand and describe flow, and what it tells us about what we value as humans. It explains why we can lose ourselves in some tasks, whereas while undertaking others time seems to drag.

Csikszentmihalyi defines flow as any activity that requires/offers:

1. complete concentration on the task;
2. clarity of goals and reward, and immediate feedback;
3. the transformation of time (speeding up/ slowing down of time);
4. an experience that is intrinsically rewarding, has an end itself;
5. effortlessness and ease;
6. a balance between challenge and skills;
7. a merging of actions and awareness, losing self-conscious rumination;
8. a feeling of control over the task.

This is a delicate balancing act – just enough challenge to be interesting and fresh; just enough comfort to be affirming without being boring. It's much like the balancing act required within a creative mentorship itself. Though, as we have found thus far in this research project, the powerful mixture of matched participants driven by goodwill and the desire to make the experience work, coupled with a scaffolded program, mean that to varying degrees this balance is frequently achieved.

The most challenging and most rewarding aspects of the program

When prompted to reflect upon what they found challenging within the mentorship, a number of mentees were able to put their finger on specific experiences or moments, but, either at the time or with the benefit of hindsight, saw them as positive parts of the mentorship experience. Indeed, they were the very kind of stretch experience they sought from the mentorship:

[The most challenging aspect was] stepping outside the comfort zone of what you normally do and changing that, so that's the flip side of exciting new stuff.

Catapult Mentee

But as is already explicit in the second part of this response, challenge is also often the basis for greater reward (the 'exciting new stuff'). Or, in the words of one of the mentors we spoke to:

Well, the most rewarding things were the most challenging, obviously, otherwise they're not going to be rewarding, are they? You know, they're just easy victories.

Stephen Bowers

Within what is explicitly a growth, stretch experience, challenge and reward are inherently intertwined. Hence the importance of trust, for both parties, as the basis of a positive mentorship experience. But with a basis in mutual goodwill, most mentorships, well scaffolded and grounded in clear communication mechanisms, are already well on their way to achieving a balance of outcomes that most mentees value, even if they were not 'perfect' nor achieved their initial aims. The majority of mentors valued these mentorships as a reciprocal arrangement, refreshing their experience of their own work and giving back to a community they feel has given them so much.

I think the mentorship has done more for me than I could have ever imagined and it's just given me that validation or the acknowledgement from a very prominent contemporary peer that I admire that my work is good.

Catapult Mentee

Alison Smiles

3D portrait of Dan Withey commissioned for the SALA Festival 2016

Photographer: Mark Brake

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Q: Between you, did you formalise the end?

A: No, because for us it's never ended.

Pre-2018 Mentor

←
Jane Skeer

Retiring the Load III (detail)
2018

Photographer:
Grant Hancock