

Mentor Mentee

Final
report

A creative
relationship



University of
South Australia

guildhouse



The Ian Potter
Foundation

A research evaluation of Guildhouse's mentorship programs

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The design and publication of the Final Report was made possible through the University of South Australia's Creative People, Products and Places Research Centre (CP3).

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.

Report Design

Amy Milhinch

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I just believe in an encounter with a fellow creative. You're going to get something from it, whether you like it or not.

Mark Valenzuela
Catapult 2019 Mentor

Mark Valenzuela

*Once Bitten
Twice Shy (detail)*
2020

Photograph
Saul Steed



The case for investing in artist-led mentorships

Kirsten Coelho
and
Christina Gollan

In the JamFactory
studios, 2021

Photograph
Saul Steed



The Guildhouse Catapult program is an artist-led mentoring program launched in 2018 with generous support from the Ian Potter Foundation. Catapult fosters ambition, providing flexible opportunities for funded mentorships for visual artists at all stages of their career. The program design purposefully encourages participation from culturally diverse and regional artists and is embedded within the Guildhouse breadth of artistic and professional development initiatives.

Guildhouse has a long history of artistic career development. Our 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 1,100 artists through programs and initiatives.

This partnered research study, conducted by the University of South Australia, was envisaged as a critical element of the Guildhouse Catapult mentorship program. 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 mentorship programs have always included evaluation and self-reflection; however, Catapult presented an opportunity to thoughtfully examine conditions for success, long-term impacts, and why artists gravitate towards mentorship as a primary form of career development, conditions for success, and the long-term impacts.



This final research report produced by UniSA is the outcome of a four-year study that encompassed rich qualitative research with mentor and mentee participants in the Catapult program 2018-20 in addition to a cohort of artists who had participated in Guildhouse/Craft South mentorship initiatives since the year 2000. Given the tumultuousness of recent years, this study offers an important insight into the challenges artists are facing to realise their creative and professional ambitions, and the unique role funded mentorships like Catapult play in empowering artists to meet the gaps that are becoming ever more evident in artistic career development in Australia.

Guildhouse's approach to delivering the Catapult program evolved during the period of this study, responding to feedback from participants and changing world circumstances. An expanded partnership with Country Arts South Australia has supported more regional artist engagement, well exceeding our target of 15% participation in the program. Participation by First Nations artists increased significantly, and the partnership with Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art has showcased the importance of these rich artistic partnerships. Enabled by Zoom video meetings and Google Hangouts, mentorships have crossed international borders.

We've learned what kind of support mentors and mentees need to set the partnership up for success, and we've adapted our team accordingly with the generous assistance of the Ian Potter Foundation.

Guildhouse has facilitated peer cohorts of mentors and mentees meeting regularly throughout the mentorship process to share experiences and create new networks. This opportunity has most importantly allowed artists to learn about the mentorship model, and how others are structuring their learning based on materials, location, communication styles and ambition.

Demand from the artistic community for mentorships has increased each year of the program. Guildhouse is very fortunate to be supported by a generous community of donors, our Creative Champions, who have committed to funding Catapult mentorships for a period of three years. This certainty of support allows Guildhouse and artist participants to be ambitious, and plan for the future.

This report makes an important artist-led contribution to sector research and documentation of the long-term benefits of artistic career development, particularly noting the context of the changing education, funding, and global health environment we live in today.

Anecdotally, our sector knows the importance of funded, artist-led mentorships, however their availability, funding and structure can vary wildly, quite often dependent on project resourcing available. This report, together with its 2020 Interim Report companion, clearly demonstrates the value and importance of sustained support and advocacy for initiatives such as Catapult nationwide.

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 Creative People, Places and Products Research Centre (CP3), and its support for undertaking this research and publication of this Final report.

Emma Fey
Chief Executive Officer
Guildhouse



Emma Fey

Photograph
Denis Smith

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

	Mentors	Mentees
Catapult 2018	Sera Waters Sasha Grbich Regine Schwarzer Johannes Sistermanns Jess Wallace Darren O'Donnell	Sandra Saunders Lara Tilbrook Kaspar Schmidt Mumm Jane Skeer Christopher Williams Bridget Currie
Catapult 2019 & 2020	Lisa Cahill Kirsten Coelho Nicholas Folland Christian Hall Gray Hawk Mark Valenzuela Jason Waterhouse Tyrone Wright (and Catherine Truman who participated in this study previously)	Tom Borgas Gus Clutterbuck Maarten Daudeij Christina Gollan Rita Kellaway Fruzi Kenez Monte Masi Regine Schwarzer Sarrah Tzijan

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Continuing on the findings from the Interim Mentor=Mentee Report, both mentors and especially mentees across all three years of the Catapult program overwhelmingly found the experience to be an incredibly positive one. The investment in time and effort enabled by the Catapult mentorship was experienced by mentees as profoundly significant in terms of the overall course of their career. Given the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of the Catapult mentorship at this time proved to be invaluable to many of the artists involved, both mentees and mentors, enabling upskilling and creative connection at a time when so many other avenues to this were closed off. Moving forward, the project identifies three key areas for further growth and exploration. At an immediate policy level, there is a need for creative residencies to bring international mentors to Australia so that greater numbers of locals can benefit from their expertise and time, alongside or even at the expense of supporting individuals

to go overseas. From more of a research perspective, the project identifies the need for greater attention to be paid to what a more culturally appropriate and diverse model of, or approach to, mentorships might look like. The existing model of mentorship that assumes a time-bound and specific relationship between two individual artists is not universally believed to be either pedagogical best practice, nor how creative practice works for all artists. Secondly, for a number of our participants JobKeeper effectively functioned as a default experiment in what might happen should Australia adopt a UBI (Universal Basic Income) for creatives. The answer according to this study: more time to make art, refine websites and business plans, experiment, and create in new ways, work on marketing, self-educate via YouTube and upskill through mentorships. The lessons from this enforced experiment that nobody wanted to be part of are too good an opportunity to waste as we seize the opportunity to build back better.

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 of time 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. Guildhouse provides funding totalling \$5,000 to remunerate mentees and mentors for their time.

The mentorship itself is structured around the initial goals. The mentor and mentee together refine their plan to work collaboratively, using Guildhouse as a sounding board if there are any issues. A midway 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 albeit less formal dialogue involving mentorship, advocacy, collaboration, and peer support.

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

Possible outline of the model

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
- Check-ins with Guildhouse staff allow for ideas to be workshopped and additional connections to be made with skilled practitioners if need be, utilising the 1,000+ member database

3

Commence

- Mentorship under way (travel, meetings, studio visits, etc.)

4

Review

- Pause and reflect on goals, feedback, progress together — share with Guildhouse
- Continue to refine
- Define final chapter of mentorship

5

Completion

- Final check-in with Guildhouse staff to ensure goals were met and to identify additional opportunities to leverage the Catapult experience, e.g. grant to develop work for presentation, approach galleries, etc.

6

Evaluate

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

Project aims & methods

This four-year research project (2019–22) consisted of two primary data collection activities. Firstly, semi-structured interviews with participants were collected from the Catapult 2018 to 2020 cohorts six months after program completion, as well as from participants from the last decade in previous Guildhouse and formerly Craft South mentoring programs. Secondly, for all three Catapult cohorts, interviews were followed up six months later via an online survey. This Final Report focusses on the findings from the Catapult program, especially the 2019 and 2020 cohorts which were directly impacted by the disruptions of COVID-19. The previous Interim Mentor=Mentee Report presented interview (not yet survey) data from participants from the 2018 Catapult program, alongside the substantial body of longitudinal data from previous program participants. For this reason, to fully appreciate the long-term impacts of mentoring upon creative careers, as well as to see the full research findings from the Catapult study, it is important to read both reports in dialogue with one another.

The initial Interim Report from this project was published in October 2020. That report presented data from semi-structured interviews with mentees and mentors drawn from both the first iteration of the Catapult program (Catapult 2018), and the various precursor programs run by Guildhouse and Craft South. These interviews commenced in October 2019 and the last of the first tranche was completed in person in early March 2020, just before the impacts of COVID-19 became particularly serious in Australia (see Table 1). Catapult 2019 interviews were conducted online via Zoom; Catapult 2020 mentorships were again able to proceed in person. The need to go online for the interviews with Catapult 2019 participants made it more difficult to complete the many multiple-choice questions within the semi-structured interview, hence the often lower response rates to these among this cohort in this report. We were able to capture some of this data from participants in this cohort in the subsequent 12-month follow-up survey.

Table 1: Interview and Survey Timings by Cohort

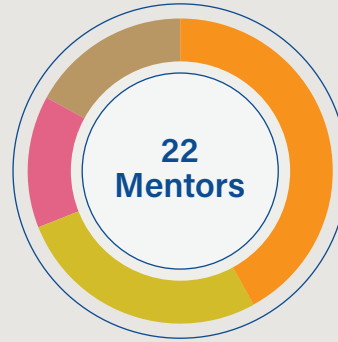
Participant Cohort	Interview Timeframe	Follow-Up Survey
Previous Participants	August 13, 2019 — March 24, 2020	N/A
Catapult 2018	December 5, 2019 — March 24, 2020	March 18 — June 11, 2021
Catapult 2019	April 28 — July 13, 2021	11–29 November, 2021
Catapult 2020	October 18 — November 18, 2021	April 4 — May 2, 2022

Overall project interviews completed

52 interviews

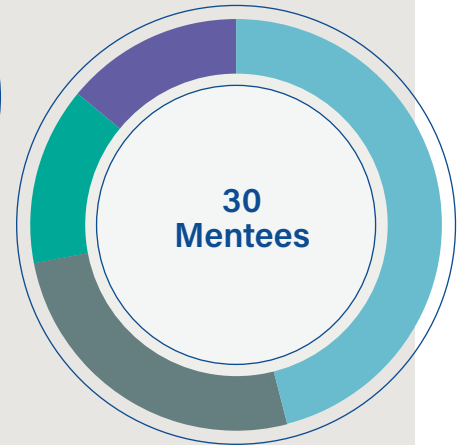
Mentors

Pre-2018 mentors	9
Catapult 2018	6
Catapult 2019	3
Catapult 2020	4



Mentees

Pre-2018 mentees	15
Catapult 2018	7
Catapult 2019	4
Catapult 2020	4



Overall project surveys completed

25 interviews

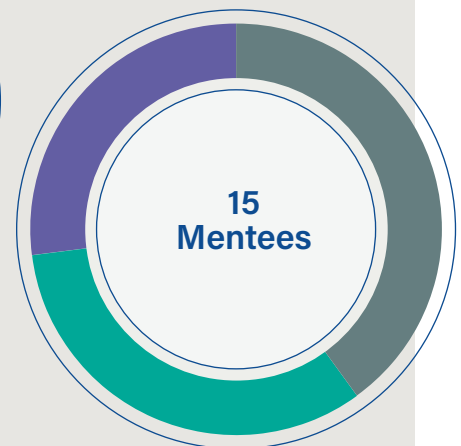
Mentors

Catapult 2018	6
Catapult 2019	1
Catapult 2020	3



Mentees

Catapult 2018	6
Catapult 2019	5
Catapult 2020	4





Gus Clutterbuck

Master of the Rocks

(parts 1 & 3)

2017–18

Photograph

Josef Muller

Age of Catapult 2018—2020 participants

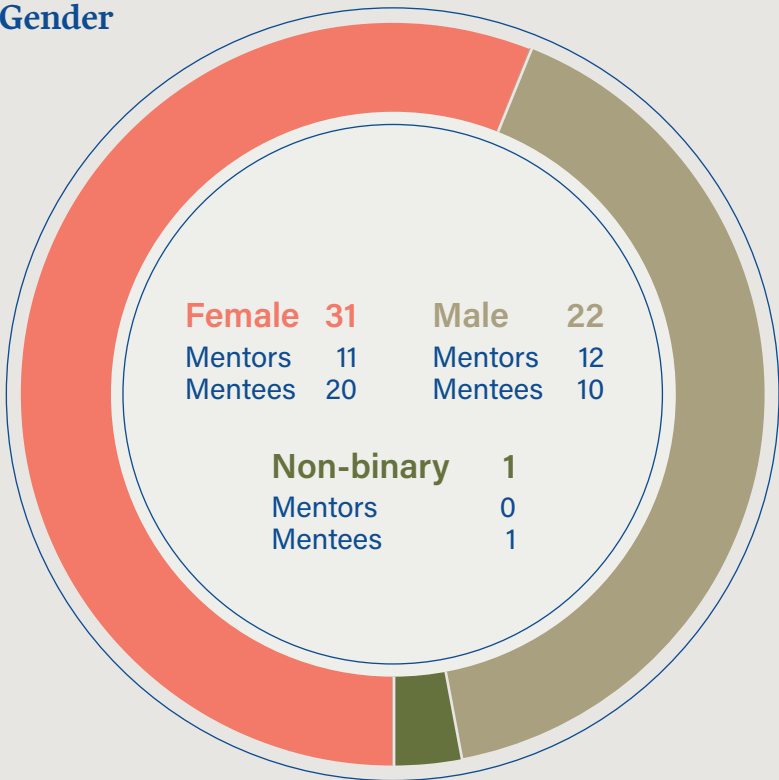


NUMBER OF RESPONSES

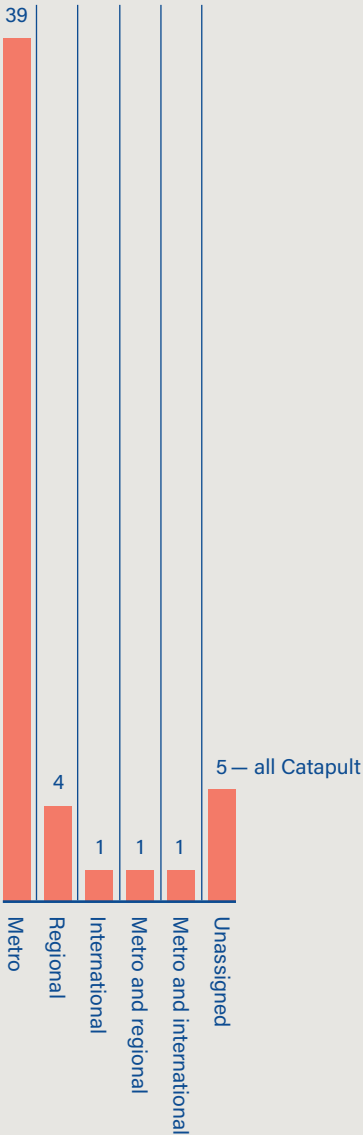
All Catapult mentees **14**
 All Catapult mentors **13**

Overall
Interview and/or Survey

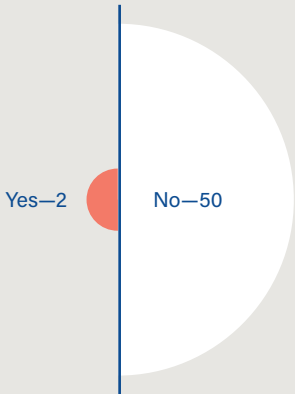
Gender



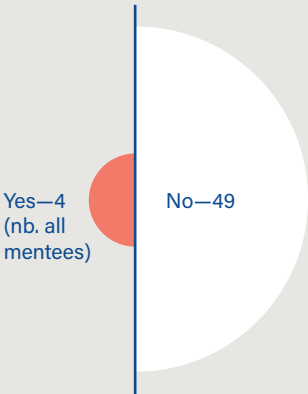
Location:
Where were you based for the period of the mentorship?



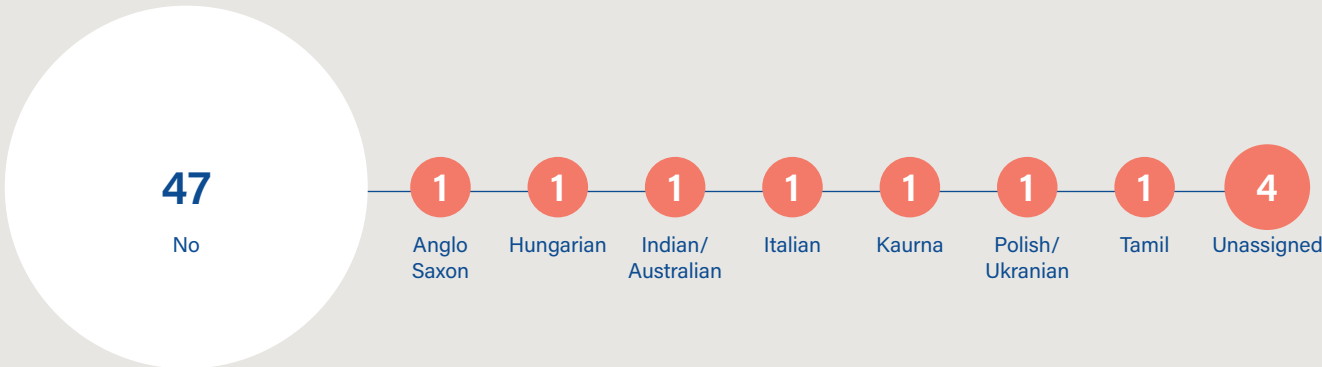
Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?



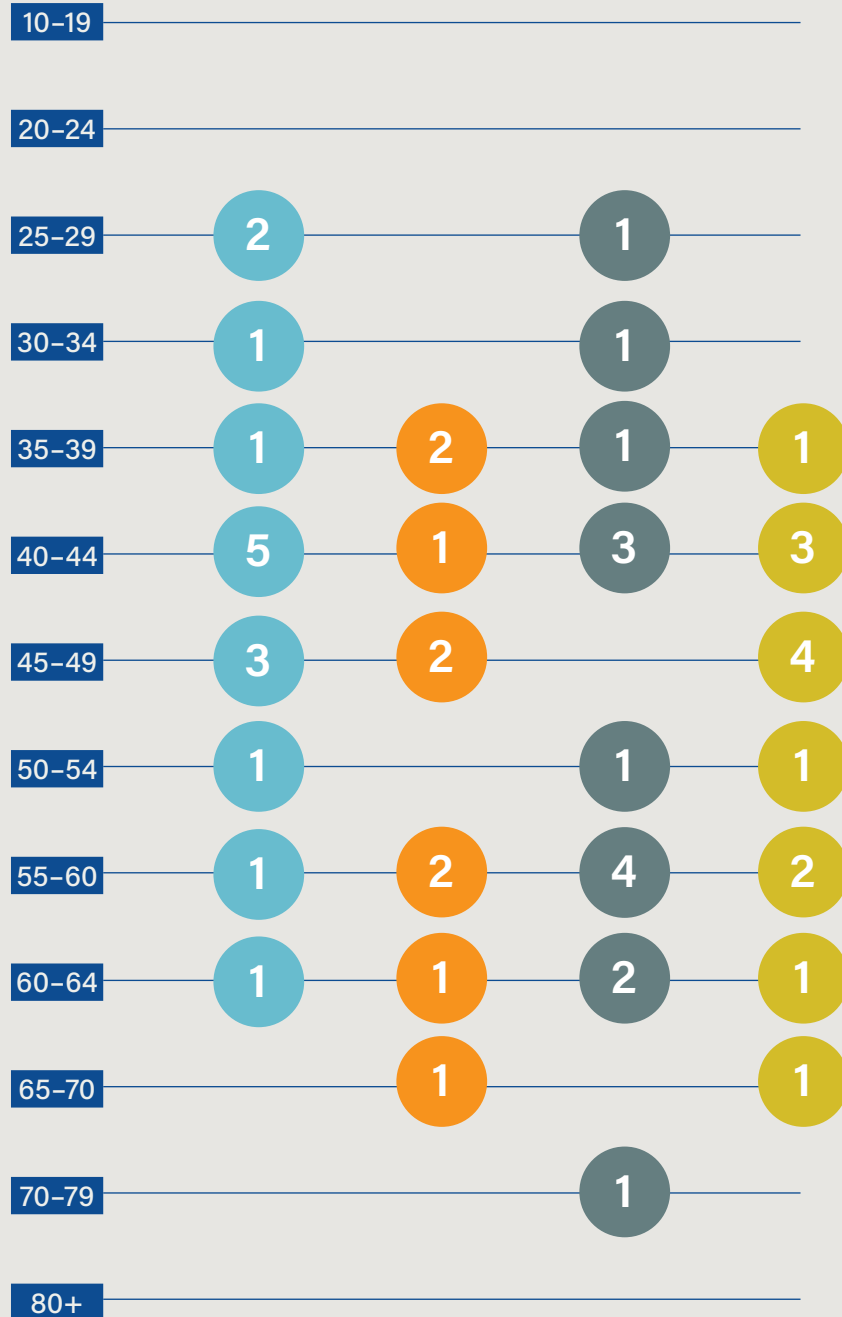
Do you identify as a person with a disability?



Do you identify with a specific ethnic or cultural group?



Age—at time of interview



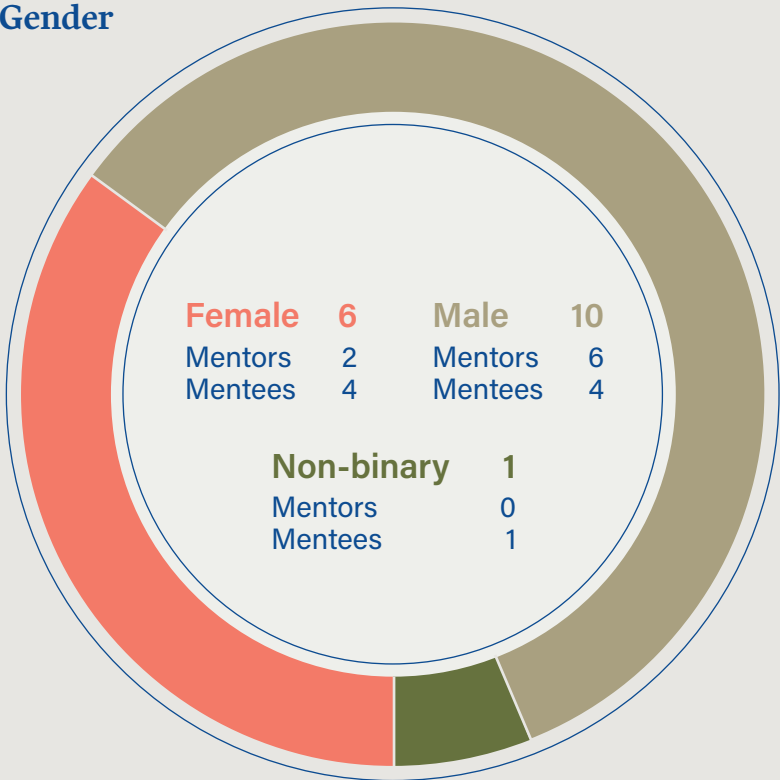
NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Pre-2018 mentees	15
Pre-2018 mentors	9
All Catapult mentees	14
All Catapult mentors	13

Catapult 2019 and 2020

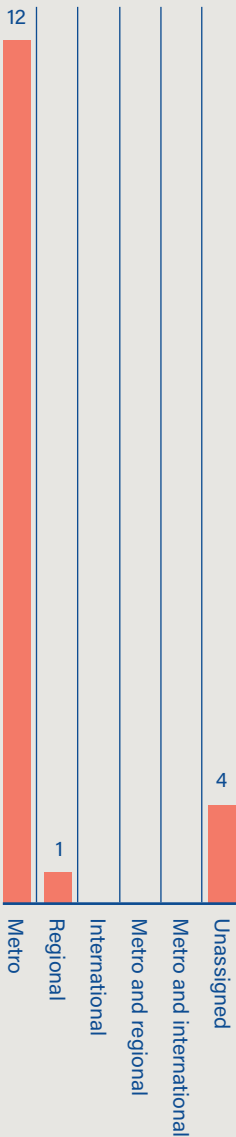
Interview and/or Survey

Gender

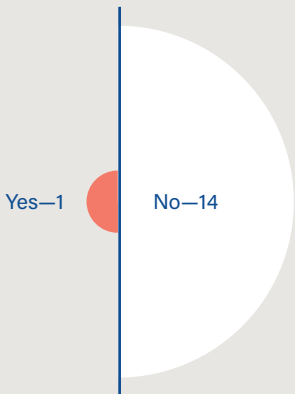


Location

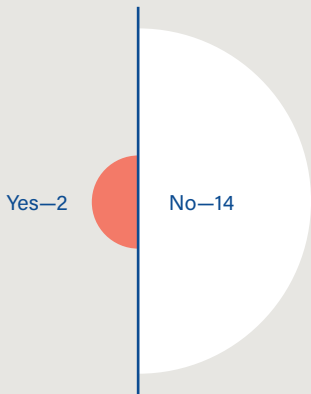
Where were you based for the period of the mentorship?



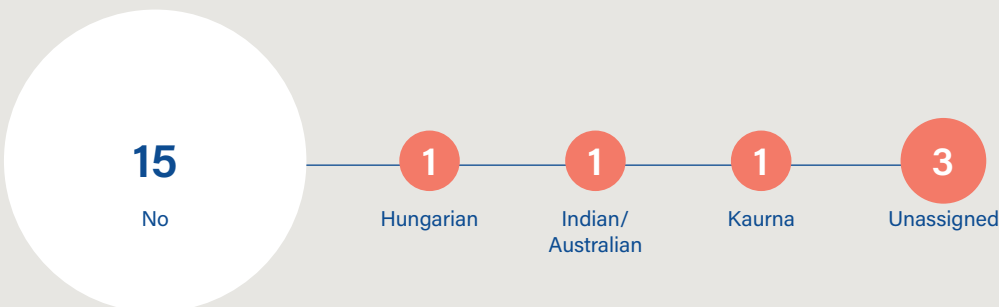
Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?



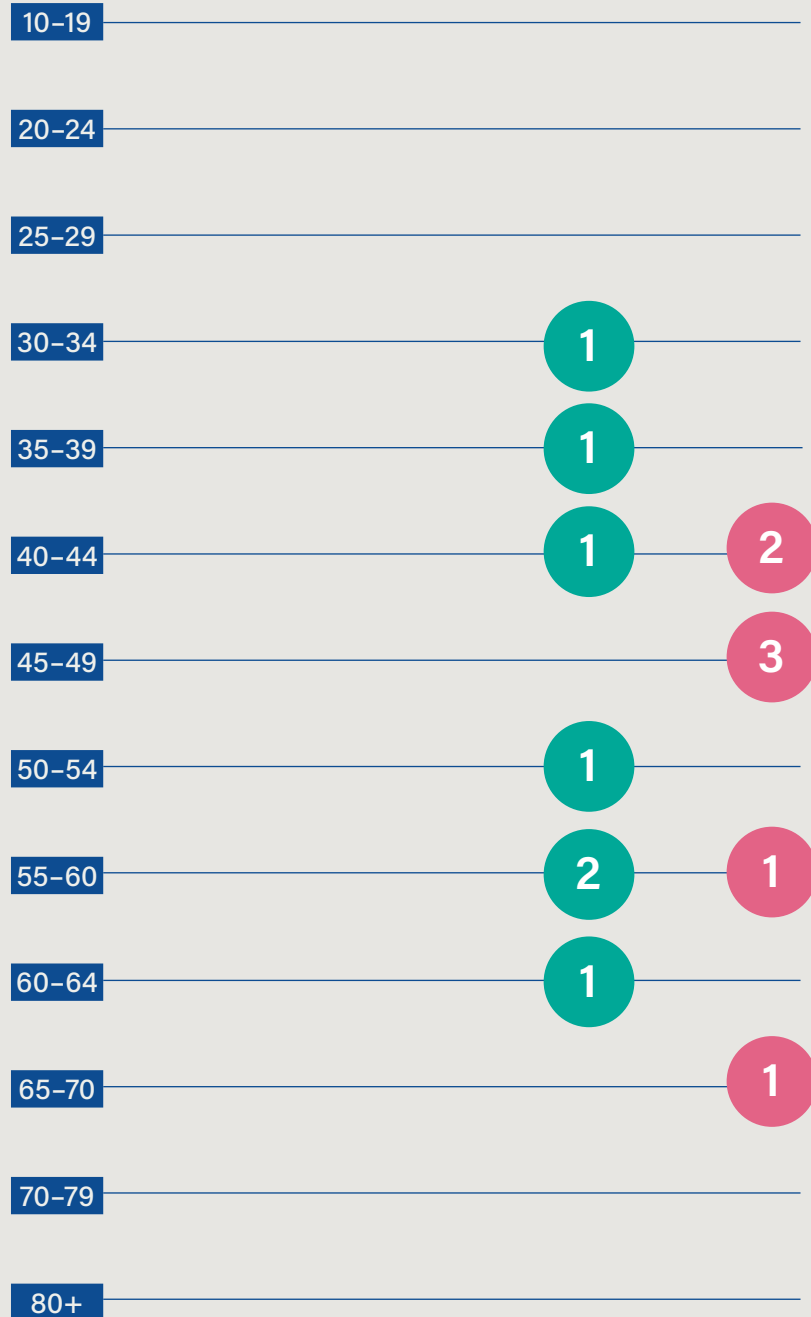
Do you identify as a person with a disability?



Do you identify with a specific ethnic or cultural group?



Age—at time of interview



NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Catapult 2019/20 mentees 7
Catapult 2019/20 mentors 7

Sam Gold and
Jane Robertson

At Caslake and
Pedler Glass
Studio
2021

Photograph
Sia Duff



Value and Benefit

Continuing on from the findings of the Mentor=Mentee Interim Report, both mentors and especially mentees across all three years of the Catapult program examined in this research study overwhelmingly found the experience to be a highly positive one. Positive outcomes were again experienced across a range of areas both practical or technical (e.g. 'I learned a new skill or technique', 'I developed a new body of work') and more psychological or personal (e.g. 'I feel more empowered', 'I feel more engaged in my practice'). All but one of the mentees who participated in the research project reported that the Catapult mentorship had been either 'invaluable' or 'valuable' in enhancing their creative practice (the other respondent felt it too early to say). Again, too, there was a clear sense that the gains mentees derived from the program were not just short-term. Rather, the investment in time and effort enabled by the Catapult mentorship was experienced by mentees as profoundly significant in terms of career advancement, something that will have life-long impacts.

Oh, it's been huge. I tell Christian that he changed my life, and he just gets embarrassed, but it's true what I needed and I was looking for was someone to push me and elevate my practice, and that's pretty much what happened. It was a pivotal turning point.

Sarra Tzijan
Catapult 2020
Mentee

It's not the sort of thing you are going to forget that you did.

Monte Masi
Catapult 2020 Mentee

Above all else, participants are grateful the Catapult program exists, as well as Guildhouse itself. Of particular note is their appreciation of the fact that it is one instance of mentoring in which participants are paid for their time rather than expected to work 'for the love of it'

Outcomes:

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

Mentees

TOTAL CATAPULT 2018–2020

Interviews and surveys

NUMBER OF
RESPONSES

29

23

MENTEES
SAID:

I learned a new skill or technique

21

I feel more empowered to continue creating independently

21

I diversified my practice

19

I feel more engaged in my practice

18

I have had the satisfaction of passing on or gaining specialist skills

18

I developed a new body of work

17

I expanded my networks

15

I increased my potential to generate an income

13

I feel more certainty around my career path

13

I have increased my profile

13

I increased my exhibition or presentation opportunities

11

I have achieved more respect from other people

11

I am more valued professionally

9

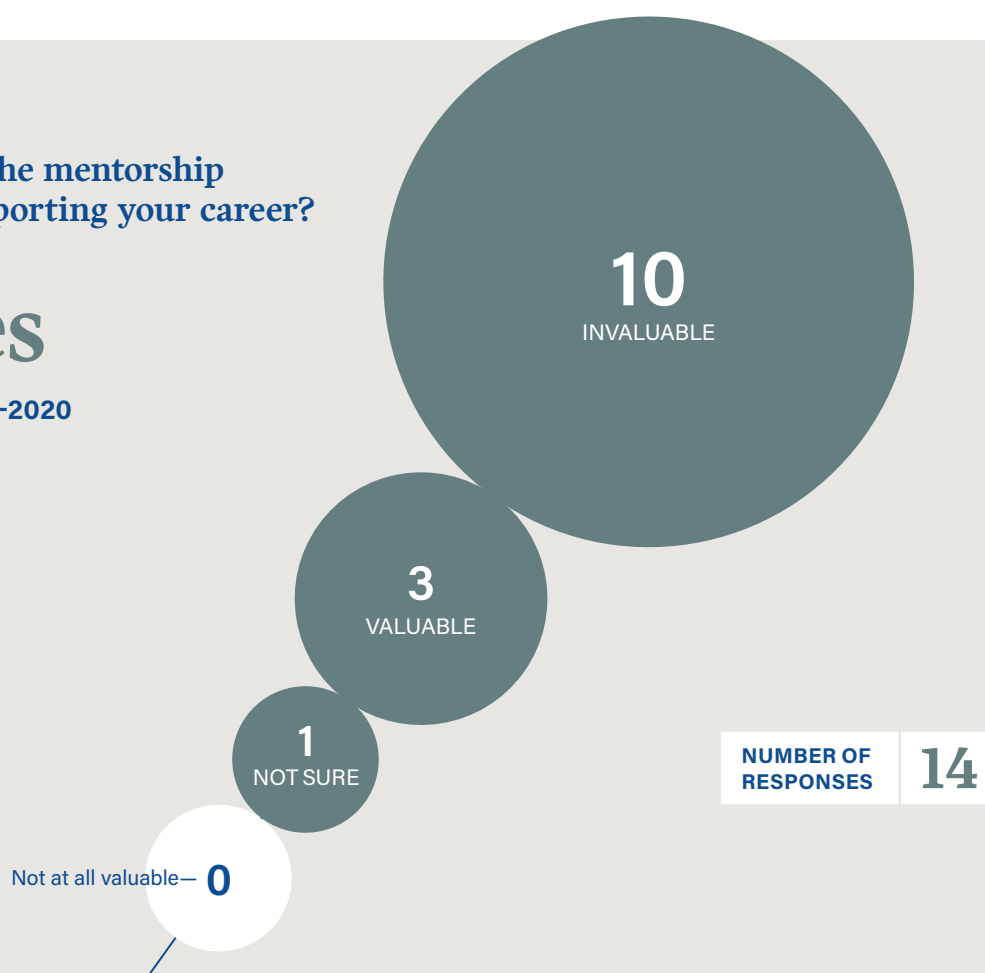
I have developed a more sustainable practice

How valuable was the mentorship opportunity in supporting your career?

Mentees

TOTAL CATAPULT 2018–2020

Interviews



For mentees, one of the most rewarding aspects of the Catapult program was simply having the opportunity (money, time, space, and support) to focus on developing a relationship with a peer/mentor. This included having the chance to visit mentors in their studios, and to informally engage with their networks and make new connections. That for many mentees this came early on in their careers was seen as something of an accelerator of their professional and personal development. This was especially the case if the relationship was balanced to create a constructive and positive space within which the mentee felt willing and able to challenge themselves and move outside their comfort zone. Cross-disciplinary collaborations were valued for the ways in which they offered insights into completely different approaches to being creative, including around participants' own work. While Catapult did not require firm outcomes such as exhibitions, there were clear achievements across all three cohorts in terms of accessing significant new opportunities. This included, for example, work produced as part of the program being exhibited in, and then purchased by, the Art Gallery of South Australia. Even when outcomes were not so direct, mentees were nevertheless grateful for the opportunity to work with mentors whom they deeply respected.

Likewise for mentors, the experience was overwhelmingly a rewarding one, enabling reciprocal learning, creative connection, and the opportunity to give back to a community that had supported them.

How long do you expect the benefits from the mentorship to continue?

Mentees

NUMBER OF
RESPONSES

29

TOTAL CATAPULT
2018–2020

Interviews
& Surveys

1 MENTEE
SAID:

Up to a year after
completing it

2

2–5 Years

0

5–10 Years

NB. 'Highest'
response taken if
multiples selected
(those who chose
'Turning Point'
tended to also tick
'Entire Career').

19

Over the course
of my entire career

7

It was a pivotal turning
point for my career

0

It was not
beneficial

I understood my practice better through the mentorship. It's a little bit intangible, but I felt there was an increased sense of relevance to my work for me. And so there was this sense, an additional sense of purpose in practice through doing it.

Christian Hall
Catapult 2020
Mentor

It's always nice to meet someone who is on a similar path and is willing to absorb something that you are saying and that's nice and just see it immediately in practice afterwards that was really quite rewarding.

Rone
Catapult 2019
Mentor

I feel like there's never been any end. I think officially there was an end, but I sort of will always feel like I'm happy to give her advice in that way. The other thing too is, I didn't say in the last one when you said did I see any unexpected gains, I felt like when she was here and even afterwards on the phone calls, I feel like there's been a bit of her mentoring me too – not in an official way, but more like [asking her] 'what do you think of this artwork?' I feel like it's a bit of a two-way street as well because she's a peer and even though she's 20 years behind me in her career stage, I still feel like she's got a valid opinion so I can ask her opinion about the direction of my artwork or my practice or whether I should apply for things too. In that way, it's become less of a mentorship but more of just a network.

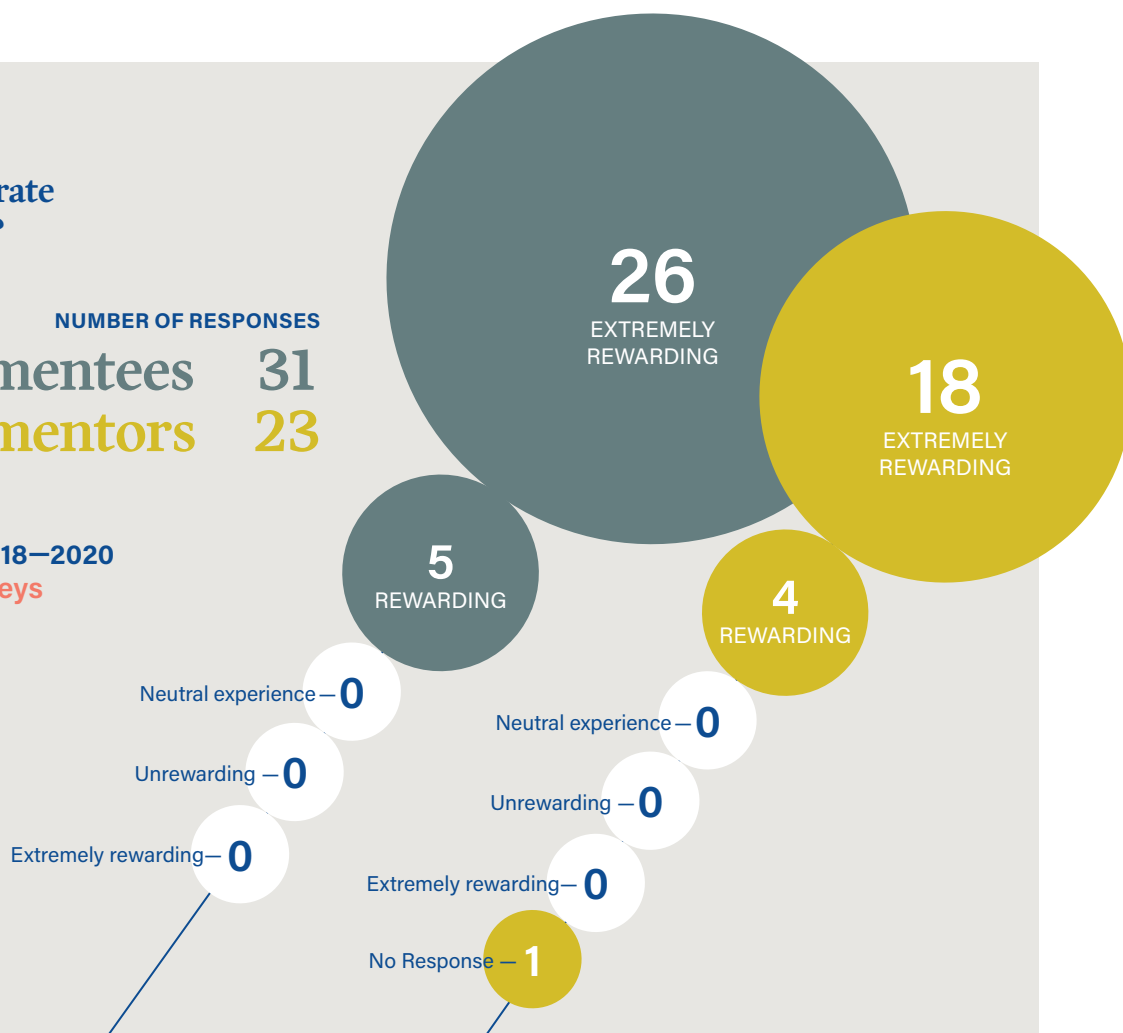
Lisa Cahill
Catapult 2019
Mentor

How would you rate your experience?

NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Catapult mentees	31
Catapult mentors	23

TOTAL CATAPULT 2018–2020
Interviews and surveys



I think there's always mutual benefit in dialogue, especially good dialogue, and that's what a mentorship's about.

Catapult 2019
Mentor

As conveyed by one Mentor, it is not just the mentees getting a confidence boost:

It tickles your ego a bit because someone actually thinks you're good enough to offer that to them. I thought I was just a person, you know, and then someone goes no, your ideas mean enough to me to formalise that stuff, it's a pretty nice thing. Then, obviously, if you do it well there's lots of things to be gained. So to have someone put their trust in you, that they're baring their soul with that pure idea and going 'fuck man, what do you think, is it okay?' 'Can you help me make it better?', like what a privilege. That's super cool.

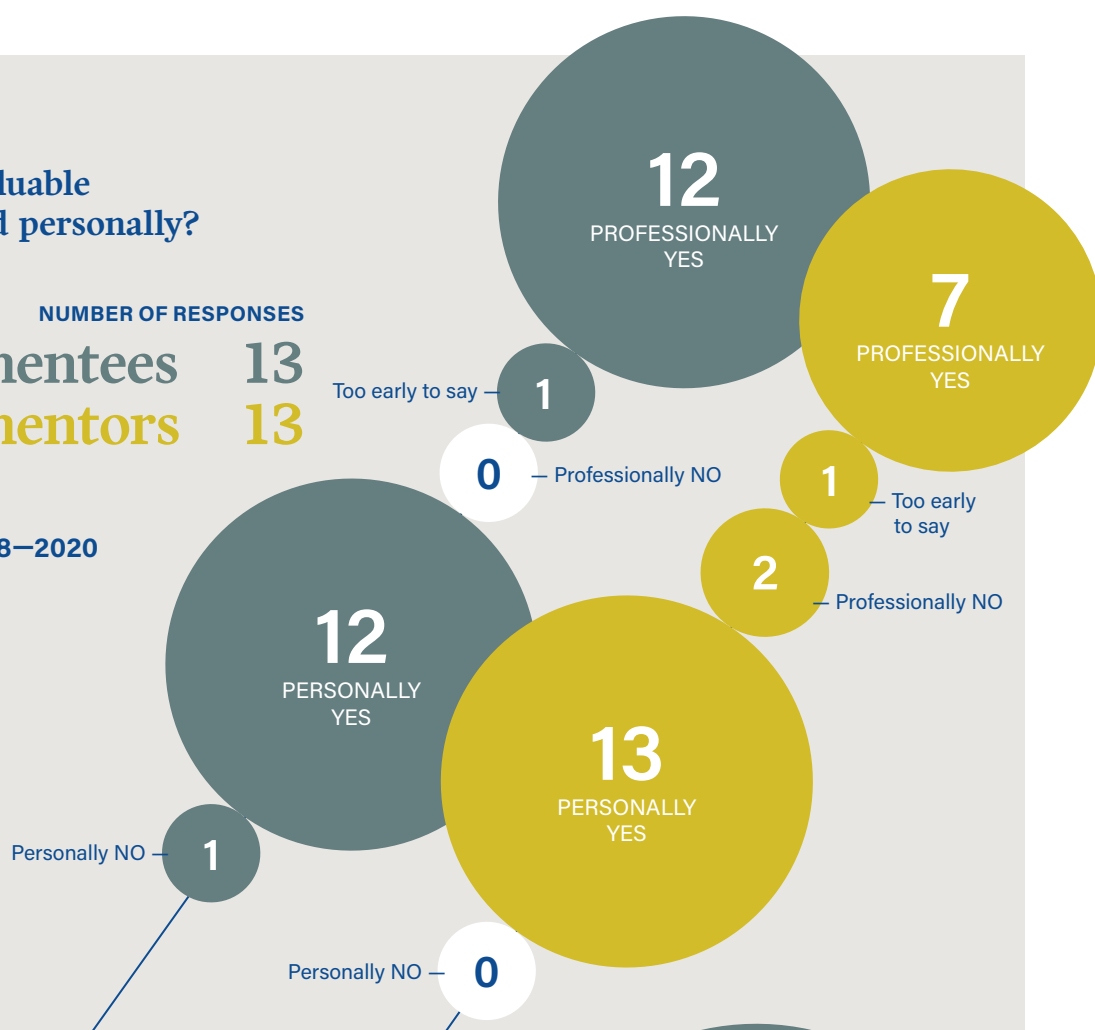
Catapult 2019
Mentor

As was noted in 2020's Interim Report, while the Catapult mentorships per se have a finite lifespan, the reality is that for most of the research participants the relationship continues in some form. While mentees recognise they should no longer presume the same levels of access or time, in many cases mentors remain invested in the reciprocal spirit of the program and open to giving advice, suggesting connections and opportunities, or just catching up for a coffee and/or beer.

Did you find it valuable professionally and personally?

Catapult mentees 13
Catapult mentors 13

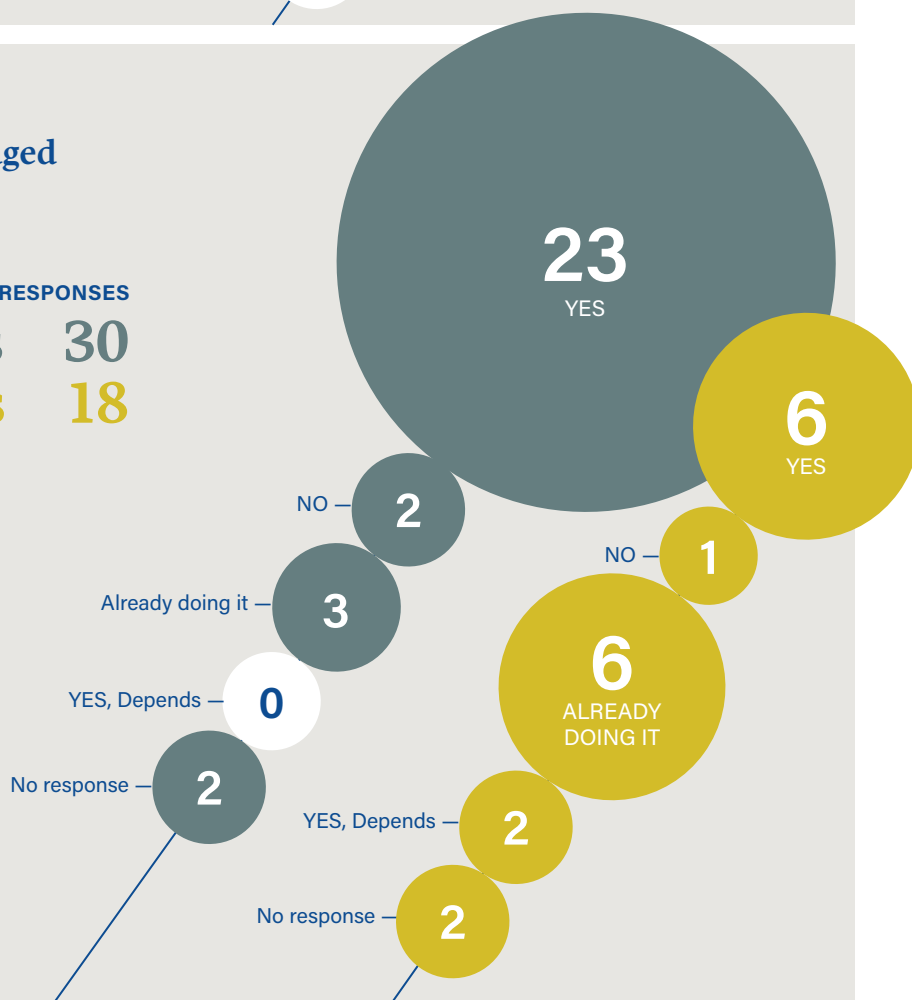
TOTAL CATAPULT 2018–2020
Interviews



Has your experience encouraged you to mentor others?

Catapult mentees 30
Catapult mentors 18

TOTAL CATAPULT 2018–2020
Interviews and surveys



Mentorship logistics and experience

Clear boundaries, communication, and a good structure so both parties can manage expectations.

Mentee
Catapult 2020

Most of the people we interviewed reported having extremely positive mentorships which advanced their practice and, in some cases, careers as well. Some mentor-mentee pairings were ideal, not just in terms of being a good fit in regards to skills and abilities, but also due to affinities around shared expectations, use of time, and reward for effort. Others had less satisfactory experiences, even if their mentorships still contained both pleasurable and valuable aspects.

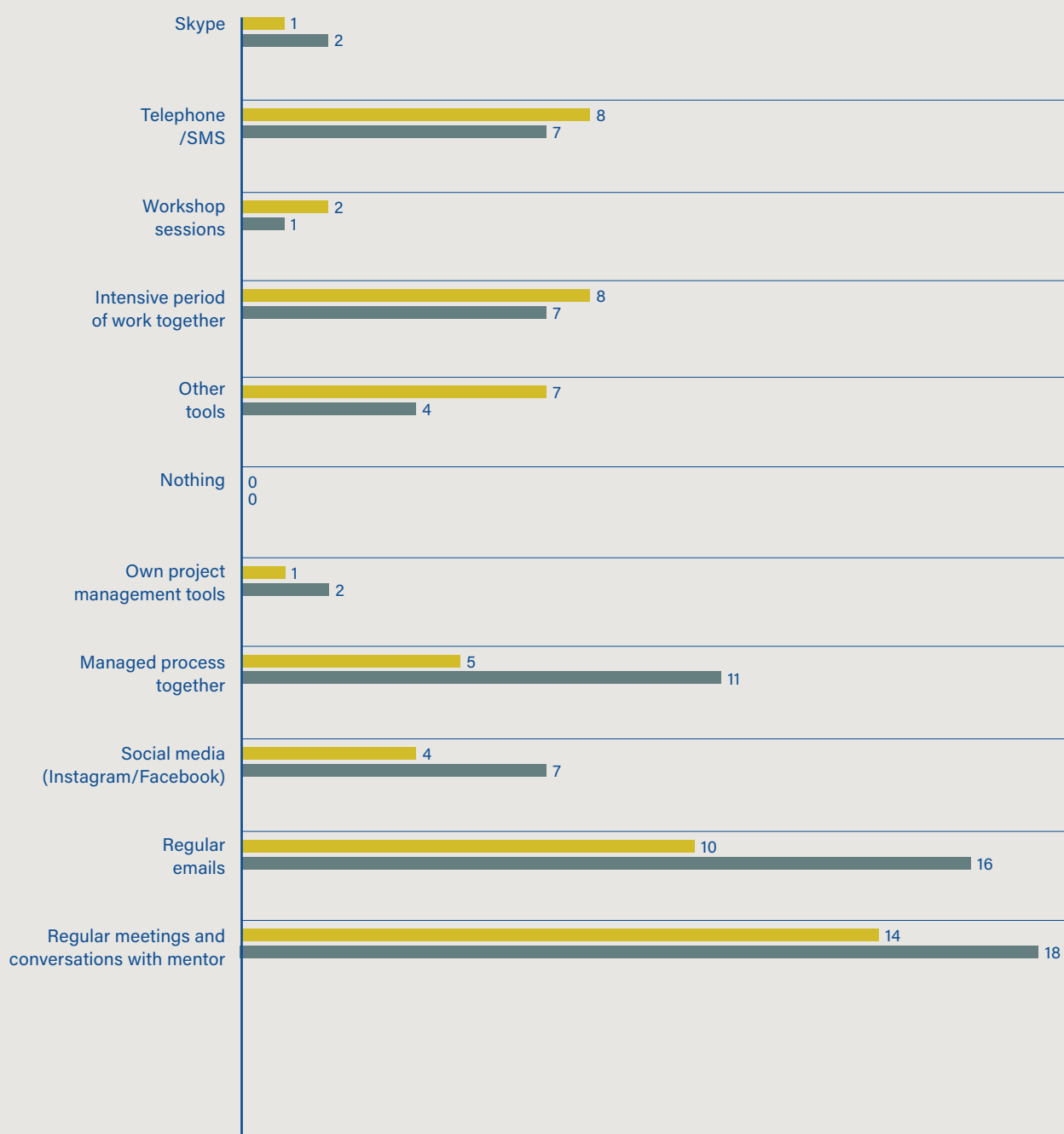
When mentoring relations worked, usually it was because expectations were clear on both sides, contact was regular/returned when sought, and measurable progress made (often in the form of significant funding or exhibition outcomes). Though mentors could sometimes be grateful for this success, some felt they had been too generous with their time. Mentors who expressed this concern stated that maintaining a certain level of support was not sustainable long-term, and that they needed to find a way to manage this with their mentees post-Catapult. For mentees, issues tended to concern mentor availability (or clarity around what they were willing and able to offer). For mentors, there was a feeling that some mentees needed to push themselves harder and/or have clearer tangible outcomes planned for the mentorship.

With interstate and overseas borders and many traditional spaces for collaboration closed for much of 2020 and 2021, a more 'back to basics' approach emerged as mentors and mentees negotiated the challenges of working together under the pandemic. This involved, for example, phone calls and taking advantage of windows of possibility to engage in shorter but more intense periods of collaboration. One of the things which emerged strongly in the interviews with mentees was the value they placed on being let into the worlds of their mentors. Whether it was through gaining insights into professional networks or studio spaces, participants learned much from simply observing how and where more established artists work. Even something as basic as seeing how a workspace or working day is organised became an important part of mentees' tacit learning alongside the more formal part of the mentorships.

What strategies did you use to manage the mentoring process?

TOTAL CATAPULT 2018—2020
Interviews and surveys

NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Catapult mentees **30**
Catapult mentors **23**



Mentorship logistics and experience

While different aspects of the Catapult program appealed to different people, virtually all participants appreciated the fact that their time was paid for, even if incompletely or in a way that didn't facilitate as much collaboration as some mentees had hoped for. The open-ended and customisable scope of the program, including the space to focus on experimenting with new ideas or techniques, was widely seen as a uniquely valuable aspect of the Catapult program that would have otherwise been unavailable to participants.

I think what it gave me was time or focus. It was the time to kind of work on some specific performance approaches that I don't think that you can easily get access to in another way unless you want to do slightly more formalised kind of study.

Mentee
Catapult 2020

But while the freedom to experiment without the pressure of deadlines or the requirement for specific outcomes was a much-valued aspect of the Catapult program, mentees still felt the need to establish clear structures around their mentorships. For mentors, the desire to also do this often took the form of the fear that the absence of deadlines and other pressures could lead to mentees not using their time constructively. The early establishment of clear expectations and goals through dialogue, even in the case of mentees exploring new areas, was seen by both parties as an important part of the process, leading to a sense of progress and achievement despite the absence of deadlines and concrete outcomes.

I think she definitely has progressed, and that the mentorship did help her achieve those outcomes. One of the ways I think she's progressed is her capacity to articulate what she wants to do, and the value of that in context. I talked about the Catapult program application and some of the key things that needed to be articulated and so that was in place before we even got going. I always thought it was my job to prepare them to have realistic expectations about what the program was going to be for them, and so that's when that starts.

Mentor
Catapult 2020

I think the most important thing is that the two people have to be on the same page, which is why it's so good to have that [clearly discussed] even if it's not set in stone, but to have that little contract and that budget in place, I think is actually extremely important. Because had it just have been like here's 5K, do as you will, I think that would really disempower some people. So for me, that's actually been a real value, where in the beginning I went 'how the shit would I know how this is going to look? I have no idea what we're going to do'.

Mentee
Catapult 2020

Goals: What did you hope to gain from participating in the mentoring program?

(please choose as many as you see as appropriate)

Mentees

TOTAL CATAPULT 2018–2020

Interviews

NUMBER OF
RESPONSES

13

13 MENTEES
SAID:

To learn from the
mentor's experience
and knowledge

12

To learn from
each other

12

To be inspired

11

To give feedback
on a specific
creative project

11

To learn new skills
and develop creative
process and practice

10

To gain personal insight
and develop as a
creative practitioner

10

To get support for
my creative practice
from the mentor

9

To increase my
self confidence

7

To access networking
opportunities

6

To establish
relationships between
established and
emerging artists

6

To gain insight
into industry

4

To get project
experience

4

To learn business skills,
tools and knowledge.

3

To build my
national profile

NB. It is notable that all 4 of the 'To gain project experience' responses came from Catapult 2018 and thus prior to the arrival of COVID-19 and its disruptions to collective projects.



Matea Gluscevic

Flossy Platforms
2021

Photograph
Morgan Sette

It was negotiated from the start that the core reason for the mentorship was structured around a program. So there was a product design program, there was some skills development. Intermeshed in that, there was some professional development things that we were going to do. We structured it all. We talked about all of those aspects of the program. So that was there at the very start — we know it's going to go in those directions, and we're predicting that it's going to follow this line. Should other opportunities arise, I'm willing to change, and [my mentee is] alert and open to lots of possibilities. So we knew going in that this was a work of fiction that was going to be a really good normal to reset to should we need to. And that was all discussed.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

As per the above, it was generally understood that goals might need to be revised (including in light of pandemic and other impacts), but that this can be easily and effectively done if they are in place from early on.

What's a really strong thing with the Guildhouse Catapult program is acknowledging artists' time. Both the mentor and the mentee. And I think that is a really strong thing, that artists shouldn't be expected to just kind of do these things without getting compensation. So being able to spend time with someone like [my mentor], because I could pay [them] through the mentorship, was just very important.

Catapult 2019 Mentee

On the basis of your experience...

...what
makes for
a good
Mentee?

...what
makes for
a good
Mentor?

A good mentor, according to mentees

Firstly, their heart has to be in the right place. They want to want to share that information. They have to have that wealth of knowledge to lean on to begin with, not just the hoity-toity of a great career (because some people manage to luck into it, and I do admire that, although I would say, of course, the vast majority of artists really have to carve it out with genuine toil). They have to genuinely be interested in investing in someone and wanting to be that guiding light.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

I think someone who's generous, knowledgeable, and someone who's probably not totally self-focused.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

I think you've got to listen to what your mentee is telling you. I guess deep down you've got to believe that you have got something that can be of benefit to the mentee, right, whether that's just life experience or whether that's specific knowledge. I think that the mentor, probably just by nature of the sort of dynamic, should try and kind of hold the mentee accountable to what they say they're going to do or what they say they want. Presumably at some point in that relationship the mentee has expressed a desire for something or a goal for something or something that they are broadly working towards. So I suppose that the mentor should take on some of that accountability.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

Someone who inspires you who brings out the best in you.

Catapult 2020 Mentee

Someone who is open, and you can establish trust with would be a big thing because I think creative work is personal and if you're not able to speak openly and honestly about it, it's hard to really grow and get to that next stage.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

I think it has to be challenging. You want to have a mentor who challenges you, hopefully in as many ways as possible, without completely losing it. Don't completely lose it. But if it's a big challenge, it's not just cosy conversations, but actually the very foundation on which you operate, if that can be dug out a little bit deeper and better to have more profound foundations for knowledge. It's pretty good.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

A good Mentor, according to Mentees

[Someone] who really gives me the space to speak. So giving space.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

You have to be very generous, sincere, and well obviously delivering what you are supposed to do – like helping the mentee to achieve what they really set out to do. You actually agree on that together because it's a little contract really I feel. And being flexible enough and keeping it fun and light-hearted enough.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

Someone who's really willing to share their knowledge, freely share their skills and knowledge. I think that having the experience that you're looking for, so you know, matching the skills or knowledge and experience that you're looking for yourself, ensuring that person's got that. I [also] appreciated that she was doing that on her own, being self-sustaining as an artist, and that was important for me.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

[You] need to be someone that's got an openness, space, and the kind of time to develop a significant relationship, that has an integrity to sort of move beyond maybe just professional sort of advice, that's my kind of feeling about it. Obviously generosity is super important. I think another really important thing is just a consciousness around a reciprocal relationship as opposed to a person that's like, 'I know everything and you're coming to me cos I'm going to tell you what's going on'. I was reading something about this, it was an interview with Emma from Guildhouse, and she was talking a bit about Catapult and this notion that a mentorship is this real exchange, rather than a one-sided getting information from someone else the foundation is just realising that the other person that you're teaching comes with a knowledge about the world that you don't have, and that's the foundation for sharing and teaching.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

A good mentor, according to mentors

Having the humility or having your ego in a healthy position and not the driver's seat.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

I think – well firstly, you have to listen. You have to really be willing to listen and feel uncomfortable. You need to recognise when you're out of your depth, and be okay with that. And I think you need to be responsive to the exhaustion levels of the mentee, as well. Like, I noticed that there were certain points where we would get going and I would be good to go for another three hours, and [my mentee's] face would literally drop. That for me is part of the listening process, as well, that you're really being responsive to the person that's there.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

I would say someone who's compassionate and understanding, is willing to sort of step that fine line between being honest, but also finding the way, the right way, to give constructive feedback, without hurting someone's feelings or that kind of thing. You don't want to put someone off of what they're doing, so finding the right time and place to say maybe some things that need to be said that will help that person move forward and identifying what those are. I've really had to think first about what would I feel like if that was me in this exhibition, would I expect something more than what this is? So I guess having empathy as well, being empathetic.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

I think, honesty, you've got to have the [courage] to be able to say how it is, and the mentee has to have openness to be receptive to that. I think, you know, it's just you have to be receptive to both put it out there and say what you really think, and then receive that both ways. I'm not saying that's just the mentor going 'you should listen' and the mentee go 'okay I'll listen to that', that's not what I mean. I think if you're not open, honest, and receptive on both parts, I don't think it'd work. It certainly wouldn't work for me.

Catapult 2019
Mentor

I think you've got to be open, willing to impart your knowledge. You also [need to] understand maybe what the mentee needs, because sometimes they don't always know what – you don't know what you don't know. So being able to look back on your career and being able to sort of point out some of the things that helped you along the way and be able to translate them into the mentee's career and how they can make similar successes.

Catapult 2019
Mentor

A good mentee, according to mentees

Someone who's willing to listen. Someone who wants to learn.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

An eagerness to learn, an open mind, not being too entitled to that person's time and energy, and really accepting the limitations of the mentor, because they're the one that's helping you on your path. And probably just keep your ears pricked - everything is information. Everything is information, even if it's not spoken, even if it's intuited, or you see the way that their studio is set up. You don't have to have a conversation around it, you just have that visual information, and you say it's interesting, what works for you is different to what works for me, but I like what you did over here. I hadn't thought to rig a lamp like that, instead I've been punishing my eyes, or whatever it is. So, just to be more open-minded than you think you already are, and soak everything in, like a little sponge.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

The mentee needs to be prepared to take on advice and be willing to learn without feeling like they are being judged in anyway. Clear communication of ideas and goals is also important.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

I think that for me specifically, something that I was mindful of was to be willing to question my habits a little bit because I think that sometimes habits are barriers to learning, and learning is what I wanted to do. So I think I had to try and find ways to hold onto some things, but to try to let go of others at least temporarily. I think a good mentee should be aware that even on occasions where both parties are being financially compensated for their time, the mentor has some limits on what they can provide and how they can be contacted, and so I think a good mentee will probably recognise that and behave accordingly and so will kind of understand that there might be boundaries there. I feel it's important that the mentee fulfil their end of the bargain and be willing to give stuff for feedback or show the level of investment.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

Someone who is not afraid to hear what needs working on; someone who can receive feedback and criticism well.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

Patience I found very important.

Catapult 2019 Mentee

Monika
Morgenstern

2021

Photograph
courtesy the
artist



They have to be receptive enough, to be really willing to try something new, they are prepared maybe to just listen to new ideas and concepts and at least consider them.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

You need to be clear about what you're wanting to get out of the relationship. And I think that you need to be really willing to listen to what your mentor expresses, and reflect on that and take that onboard. I mean you don't have to take everything onboard, but it's really important to listen; to listen to what they're bringing to the table, even if initially you might not necessarily like to hear what that person is saying, because it can be really uncomfortable. It's being really open to that, and open to grow and change, as a result of the relationship. And you know, the obvious – like doing what you say you're going to do and being where you say you're going to be and all that, and that sort of goes without saying, doesn't it?

Catapult 2019
Mentee

There's this notion of exchange rather than just a kind of extractive attitude towards the mentorship. Just the willingness to accept feedback I think is super important as well, an openness to the fact that what someone has to say might be truthful enough to make you feel uncomfortable you know. I think so much of creative practice is about things like editing, like throwing, like getting rid of a lot of stuff in order to realise that something's important, and so sort of that critical eye is important. be honest with yourself.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

A good mentee, according to mentors

Her inquisitive nature, her openness. Everything I talked [about] she took on board, and then that would lead to further questions and she was very receptive. I think she was willing to learn, and she was willing to say 'I'm just starting out, I don't know anything, I want to learn as much as I can'. Whereas my nightmare would be someone coming along going, 'I know what I'm going, can you just tell me how to become successful,' or something.

Mentor
Catapult 2019

I think that openness and self-direction is really important. Energy, ambition, is really important. Essentially, the way I see it in really simple terms is that my experience is being matched by their energy and their ambition. And I've got a lot of stamina and staying power, and that helps.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

A good mentee is somebody who just, who craves the company and the knowledge and the experience of their mentor.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

Being committed to what they're doing. Being willing to, even if they perhaps disagree with the mentor, to give things a try.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

A good mentee has to be very dedicated because you don't want to waste the time of the mentor.

Catapult 2020
Mentor

I think they've got to be open-minded, and they've got to be willing to listen.

Catapult 2019
Mentor

Initiative, they don't have to be told absolutely everything, they can get the key points and work out all the stuff that's in between.

Catapult 2019
Mentor



Gray Hawk and
James Howe

In Gray's studio 2021
Photograph Sia Duff

Perceived barriers to career development

Christina Gollan

Tarnanthi 2021
installation

Photograph
Saul Steed



Across all three years of the Catapult program for both mentors and mentees, securing 'Cashflow' clearly emerged as the greatest barrier facing participants (see pages 36–37). Drilling down into a little more detail here, (the absence of) 'Government Funding', 'Avenues to Sell Work', the 'Need to do Other Work to Supplement Income', and 'Interstate or Overseas Growth' were identified as key challenges. However, given these findings reflect data gathered prior to Covid-19 they don't tell the full story. The huge and immediate impacts upon how people were able to conduct their professional and personal lives in the wake of the arrival of the pandemic radically altered the possibilities open to Catapult participants. Therefore, arguably the more useful way to view this data is to make it directly comparable by turning it into a percentage of the total responses and break it up into time periods; in this instance 'Pre-Covid' (Catapult 2018 Interviews), 'Covid Year 1' (Catapult 2018 Survey and Catapult 2019 Interviews and Survey), and 'Covid Year 2' (Catapult 2020 Interviews and Survey).

Doing this, some significant trends emerge. While for pre-Covid participants 'Marketing and Promotion', 'Professional Networks', 'Business Acumen', and 'Time Management' were all significant barriers, following the arrival of COVID-19 and its lockdowns (and for many its extra time), these became less pressing for the research participants. We know from the interviews that many people spent some of this extra time working on their websites and, especially, social media profiles. The problem it seems had been less not knowing what to do than limited time in which to do it. The same appeared true for business organisation. Time management is also easier when you have more of it, and far fewer events to go to or other demands on your time. This period also saw the development of many online tools and events by organisations such as Guildhouse to fill the void left by the absence of face-to-face community activities. It also overlapped with the research participants' participation in the Catapult mentorship. In the context of pandemic lockdowns and concerns over social isolation and the loss of networks, the role of Catapult in not only compensating for but seemingly overcoming participants' lack of access to professional networks is a striking finding to emerge from this data, including the interviews:

That was really unexpected that [my mentorship] would make a big difference for me. Because, I was just surprised that when I'd get off a conversation, my fortnightly conversation with [my mentor], I felt buoyant, I felt positive, I felt motivated to keep working, where it was very easy at that time to go 'oh, why bother, nobody's coming to the galleries, nobody's coming to exhibitions, nobody's going to buy the work.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

On the other side of the coin, the impact of the closure of borders is clearly evident here in the significant rise immediately in 2020 of 'Interstate Or Overseas Growth' as a challenge.

Perceived barriers to career development

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

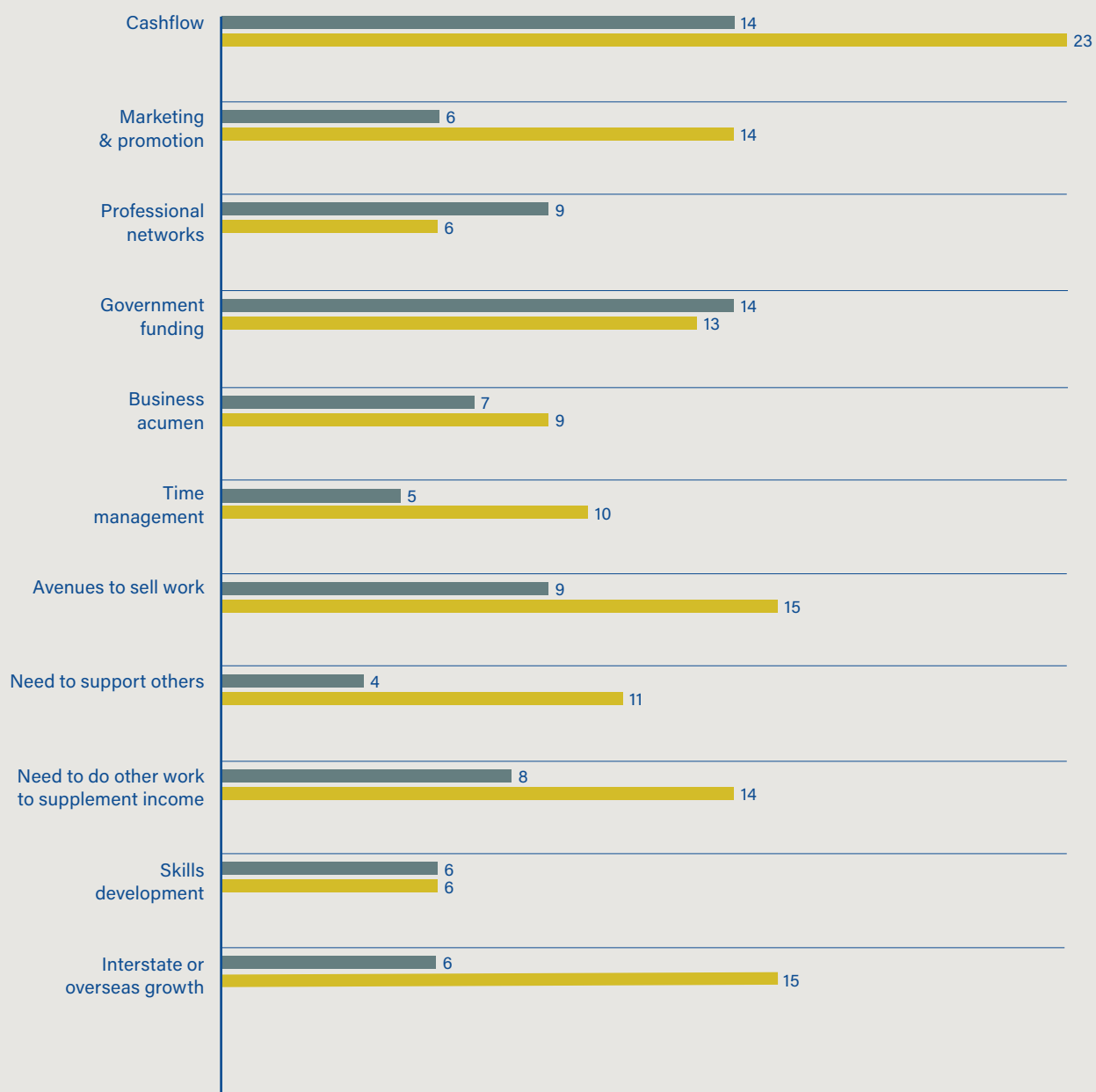
TOTAL CATAPULT 2018—2020

Interviews and surveys

Overall Total

NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Catapult mentees 30
Catapult mentors 23



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

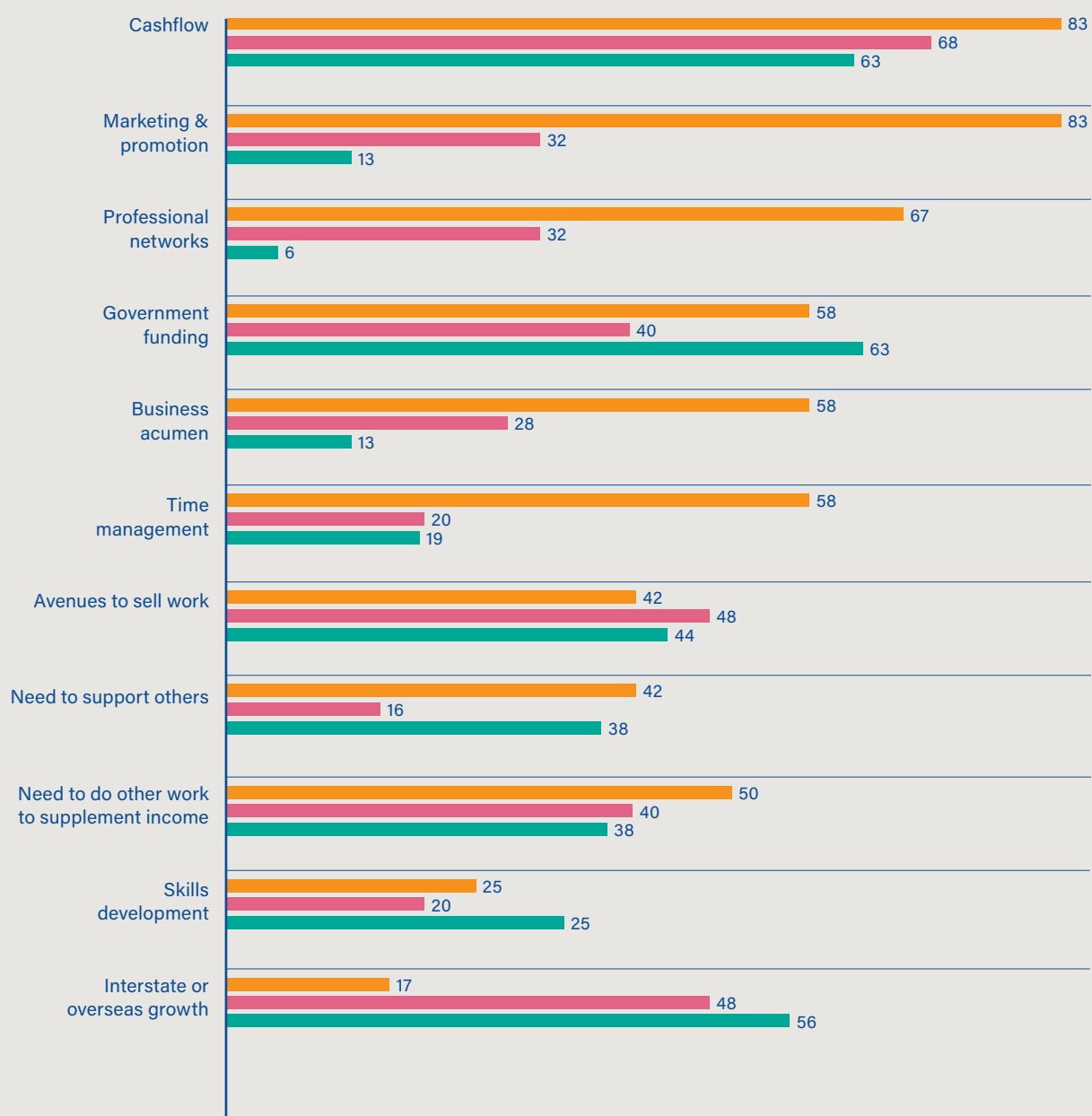
TOTAL CATAPULT 2018—2020

Interviews and surveys

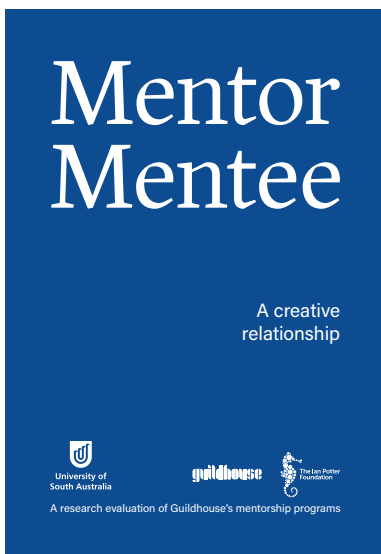
%

NUMBER OF RESPONSES

Pre-Covid 12
Covid Year 1 25
Covid Year 2 16



The Impacts of COVID-19 on Creative Careers



The previous *Mentor=Mentee Interim Report* began much as our research interviews and surveys did, with the establishment of a baseline for discussion based on participants identifying what they see as the key barriers to creative career development. But it is only appropriate in this report to address head-on the most substantial 'barrier' research participants have faced over the course of the last three or so years: the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Especially for the Catapult 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the pandemic set a context for what was and was not possible within the mentorship program, and caused participants to revise their expectations regarding what might be realistic or desirable. As we shall see, the pandemic also gave rise to some surprising opportunities.

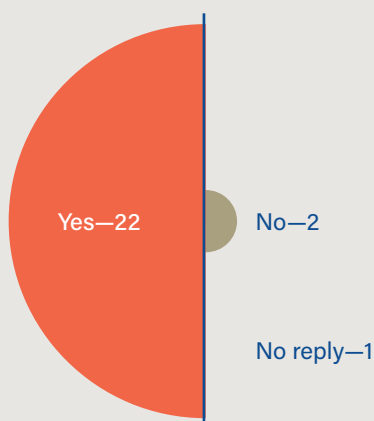
The disruptions of the pandemic prompted a re-evaluation of what we might take for granted but only appreciate when it is taken from us. What emerged especially from the 2019 and 2020 Catapult cohorts was an even stronger, genuine sense of thanks for the (paid) opportunities afforded by the Catapult program, and for the time given to mentees by mentors. It also saw a stronger articulation of gratitude towards Guildhouse, the Ian Potter Foundation, and anyone else who made the opportunity possible. Feedback on how the program might be improved was generally associated with the caveat: 'but it's brilliant already, this is blue-sky/money is no object, wish list thinking!' Against the backdrop of lost opportunities, and with recognition of the tight financial environment that arts, cultural, and creative organisations have been operating within, the Catapult program has been one of the few lights on the horizon for many artists over the last two years. It has enabled them to take advantage of the time afforded by closures to upskill rather than just spin their creative wheels.

Has Covid-19 impacted your professional practice?

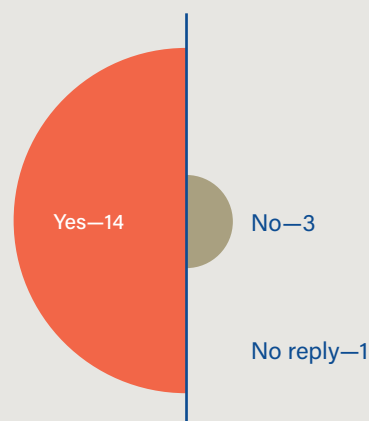
TOTAL CATAPULT
2018–2020

2 x interviews
3 x surveys

Mentees 24 RESPONSES



Mentors 17 RESPONSES



Christian Hall and Sarra Tzijan

In Christian's workshop 2021

Photograph Sia Duff

While all research participants were impacted personally, as were we all, by the pandemic, the overwhelming majority were also impacted professionally. This occurred in many shared as well as unique ways. Catapult participants were affected directly by the closure of galleries and stockists. The closure of interstate and international borders meant building networks and gaining representation outside of South Australia was made even more difficult, with these kinds of relationships essential but not easily developed through cold-calling:

Interstate representation is essential for artists in places like South Australia. This is a really good place to grow practice, but it's not self-sustaining. Economically, it's dependent on Melbourne and Sydney, crucially. And so, that community for me is a face-to-face community, and so I feel very disconnected from it now.

Christian Hall
Catapult 2020
Mentor



Gray Hawk and
James Howe

In Gray's studio
2021

Photograph
Sia Duff

Many professional association conferences and other annual events were also suspended. Notably too, the inability to travel and thus access new forms of creative inspiration, including significant works or exhibitions and collaborators, was commented upon:

My presence in Adelaide is not that much compared to the Philippines. So I show there like three times a year. Every year, I do solo shows there. Every two years, I do solo shows, but I always have major shows almost every year. [But] not so much in the last 18 months. It's really important for me because I'm one of those artists that travels a lot. My practice is reinforced by my travel and my connection with other artists from different parts of the world, which is really important.

Mark Valenzuela
Catapult 2020
Mentor

Quite a number of the participants had exhibitions cancelled or postponed, and when they were able to get an exhibition up in a local gallery they found audiences for these much smaller than usual. Opportunities for residencies also decreased, and many artists lost the income they generated through running face-to-face workshops, or casual teaching at TAFE or university. Others reliant on live performances as part of their practice found their opportunities almost completely put on hold for extended periods of time in 2020 and 2021.

All this obviously had important and profound psychological as well as economic effects. Some spoke of losing motivation for their practice when they could not be sure if they might have the chance to share it. Alongside loss of income also came a sense of stasis or, as one participant put it, 'stunted' professional growth:

[Covid's] impacted me quite a lot. Really obvious things are shows being cancelled and postponed constantly, and it's not an obvious impact in that there isn't an amount of money that you could say I've lost, but it almost stunts your development. I feel like I've lost a year or two in my career development because you're not making the connections, you're not having other peers see your work and critique it and give you feedback, you can't exhibit and have opportunity to sell or be collected, so all that stuff.

Catapult 2020
Mentee

This sense of lost growth opportunity was particularly keenly felt by less well-established emerging practitioner mentees without existing, including sales, networks to fall back onto when Covid hit. One Catapult 2020 mentee spoke of the 'instant loss of 30 grand plus.' Yet another mentee lost a key overseas collaboration and exhibition opportunity. Due to shifting geopolitical relationships, as well as Covid-related travel restrictions, they also lost all of the eight years of preparation they had done for the exhibition, and ultimately had to leave the work behind.

Leonie Westbrook and
Catherine Truman

In Gray Street Workshop
2020

Photograph
Rosina Possingham

But it is important to acknowledge that despite all the above challenges, new opportunities either emerged or were seized as artists sought to continue to develop their practice despite the trials and tribulations around them. While public exhibition and performance opportunities were shut down, with the public largely locked-down at home and with many people saving money they were no longer able to spend on travel or going out, many artists whose work could be sold online or which tapped into people's desire to enhance their homes actually ended up experiencing a boom in sales. Such was the case for furniture designer and maker Gray Hawk:



I'm hearing this everywhere. I mean, I was in at the fabric suppliers this morning. She said, 'I have never been so busy. We have just been flat out'. Covid has [meant that] for all of the tradespeople and everybody in this studio and myself as well, we have never been so busy because people are spending money instead of spending it on their overseas holidays. They're looking around their house and they're going, well, I spend so much time here, let's make this a beautiful place.

Gray Hawk
Catapult 2020
Mentor

Many smaller object makers also ended up benefitting from this shifting retail trend, especially those already linked to retail outlets with a strong (and growing) online presence:

I mean I'm used to living on very little money and usually this time of the year I don't earn a lot either and hopefully I did really well over Christmas so I can still buy a bit of food. And then last year I did pretty well because suddenly people started buying things, so the JamFactory sells my work and they bought quite a lot of my pieces to sell them which was good.

Catapult 2019
Mentee

I've had a major project cancelled and the Geelong Exhibition was postponed, but professionally it pushed me to do online sales which I jumped on the opportunity to do jigsaw puzzles which opened up a whole new revenue stream for myself, and that actually ended up being really successful for me last year. So it's kind of made me really focus on my online store and get systems worked out and in place, and now I can drop a new project and I have a streamlined system where it prints out a label and someone can pack it and a courier comes and picks it up at the door. Just making all that really easy.

Rone
Catapult 2020
Mentor

The availability of the Catapult mentorship at this time proved to be invaluable to so many of the artists involved, both mentees and mentors, enabling upskilling and creative connection at a time when so many other avenues to this were closed off.

But while most of the research participants were not fortunate enough to be in an area of practice that experienced growth as a result of the pandemic lockdowns, some were able to access emergency funding to support business development essential to enabling future growth — such as an enhanced web presence:

I was lucky enough to win a COVID-19 grant and I said I want to go online. It's a good website, so I was very lucky to win that. Like there is a video on there that was very expensive. With the COVID-19 Rescue grant it was a pretty easy because you didn't have to quotes, you just wrote how it affected you and what you want to do about it. I'm very, very grateful.

Catapult 2019
Mentee



Fruzi Kenez

Cookie-Jar Lady,
2020

Photograph
courtesy the artist

Last but certainly not least, it is also important to acknowledge the support offered to many in the creative sector through the JobKeeper program. While most artists were not eligible to access it through their professional practice, the well-known reality is that many artists work multiple jobs to make ends meet. These occur across many fields including teaching (most of which was not covered by JobKeeper), but also retail and hospitality (which was). While it was in place, the experience of having time on their hands and a temporarily secure income was a huge boon to a number of the Catapult participants we spoke to. This was time they were able to spend refining and extending their creative practice and/or their business model and marketing. The availability of more time to devote to their creative practice, coupled with the other impacts of COVID-19, significantly altered participants' perceptions of barriers to career development post-pandemic.

I must say, I feel very lucky in Adelaide. You know, because I've been through the JamFactory, and I've had a lot of close contact with the JamFactory and also the School of Art, I feel very connected to a community of wonderful artists and colleagues and mentors.

I do some mentoring at the JamFactory at the moment, so I go there once a month. But even when I don't go there, I feel like the people I've met through there over the last 20 years who themselves don't [currently] go there but we're still part of a community, an interconnected community.

Catapult 2020 Mentor

When offering a format like this kind of mentorship, I don't right away know how to resolve this. But when looking for cross-cultural, bi-cultural, cross-cultural dialogue, there's always the issue that the format in which you offer the support is very culturally embedded. Potentially, thinking about it now, the way it is or was embedded for me it could potentially have been done so that it was more easily accessible [cross-culturally].

Catapult 2019 Mentee

Building a more inclusive Creative Sector.

Acknowledging the Cultural Assumptions
underpinning Mentoring Models



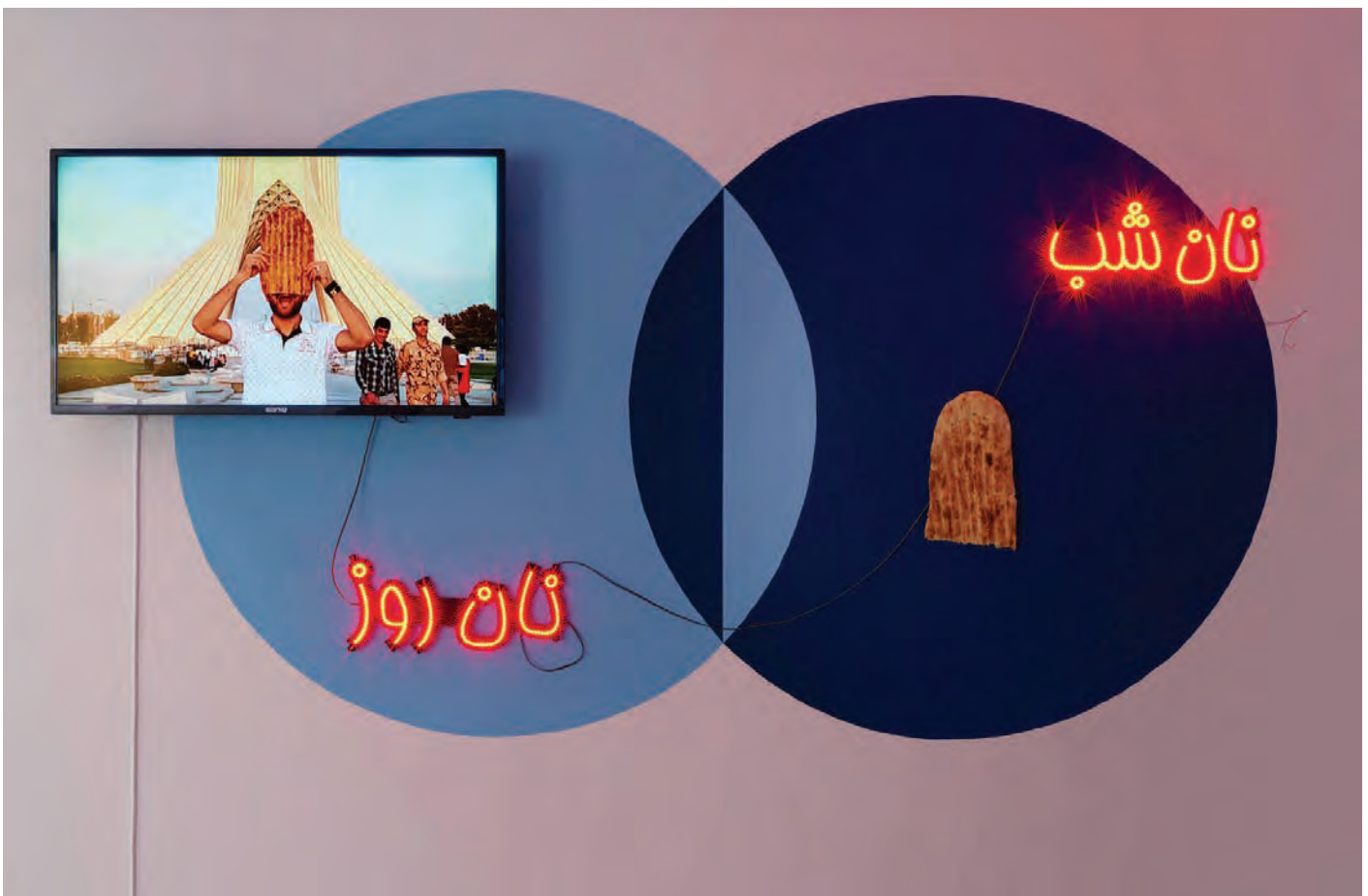
Over the three years of the Catapult program, Guildhouse has actively sought to increase the participation of artists from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including First Nations artists. While most of the mentor-mentee relationships in this study did not reflect cultural diversity, nonetheless an important issue arose in several mentorships concerning the cultural specificity of the Western arts model that programs such as Catapult operate within. Depending on their background and other factors, both mentors and mentees bring different understandings of knowledge transmission and creative practice to the relationship — this is not just something generated by the program structure itself. While it must also be emphasised that these challenges apply far more widely than just the Catapult program, a model of mentorship that assumes a time-bound and specific relationship between two individual artists is not universally believed to be either pedagogical best practice or how creative practice works for all artists.

Thomas Readett
and Tony Wilson

2021

Photograph
Sia Duff

The Final Report acknowledges that especially where Aboriginal artists are concerned, the importance of building trust cannot be underestimated and takes a significant amount of time. Thus the almost 'FIFO' (fly in, fly out) mentorship model in which relationships are quickly established and then just as quickly brought to an end cannot be assumed to be fit for purpose in all contexts. While for many Catapult participants of varying backgrounds the reality is that the mentor-mentee relationship continues in some form after the mentorship has formally ended, this cannot be assumed but is rather a choice mutually made. More broadly, the way in which the program — like many mentorships across the Global North — is based on a contractual relationship between two individuals was seen by some participants as being limited in its understanding of the frequently collective or community-embedded ways in which creative practice functions for many artists globally. Accessibility challenges also emerged as an issue in terms of assumptions around access to the tools to coordinate and undertake the mentorship including phones, postal addresses, email, and computer literacy in general. In this way, the intersectional experience of disadvantage on the basis of race and class both worked at times to disrupt the experience.



Elyas Alavi

Naan/bread, 2016-17

Photograph Grant Hancock

These findings contribute to a larger discussion under way within many arts organisations, especially following the social impacts of the Black Lives Matter movement, around the need to pay attention to the ways in which sectoral understandings of professional practice have arisen out of the experiences of a narrow cross-section of the population. Dr Karen Patel has been commissioned by the UK Crafts Council to undertake a multi-year research project exploring how British crafts practice and communities culturally exclude artists from BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds despite the good intentions of many (but not all) community members. While her work refers explicitly to craft, this study's findings are relevant here and include:

The narrow craft canon;

The lack of alternative histories and narratives in craft;

The need to de-colonise the craft curriculum;

The ongoing presence of racism and microaggressions in craft spaces;

The craft expertise of makers of colour being devalued or misrecognised;

Narrow definitions of craft as a career, and issues within craft education;

That work by culturally diverse makers was judged through the prism of their ethnicity, gender and in some cases class, and not the quality of the work itself;

The cultural specificity and limits of firm binaries between 'amateur' and 'professional', and their role in facilitating elitism;

Assumptions are made by potential customers about the types of craft that are expected from makers of colour.

(Patel 2021)

One of the clearest and most important findings to emerge from these broader international research contexts is the need for increased focus on what a more culturally appropriate and diverse model or approach to mentorships might look like.

'Now More Than Ever':

The Value of Creative Mentorships in the age of COVID-19

One notable theme to emerge from participants' comments made towards the end of the project was the impact of the winding back of hands-on studio training in the higher education sector:

So at the risk of again offending lots of people, the way it is taught these days drives me nuts. You have a large conceptual push through tertiary education with the fine arts course which is a push towards academia instead of skills-based learning which is very unfashionable. But I'm a technician, I love making [things], and my whole world is driven around doing stuff with these things. I was a TAFE teacher and I love the fact that at TAFE we delivered a skills-based learning program which had good conceptual grounding in it too, but it put the students who wanted to go on to further education, it put them head and shoulders above the rest because they could actually make [things] and that's a big part of what the art schools are forgetting to do now is teach proper ways to make stuff or even how to use people who can make stuff.

Catapult 2019 Mentor

What has indisputably emerged across this now four-year research project is the clear value of mentorships as a key mode of artistic professional development. While little scholarly research may have been undertaken thus far to provide a clear evidence base for this, the longevity of the model owes much to the implicit knowledge that direct, hands-on, customised advice, role-modelling, and direction works to enable career growth for artists.

The trend of increased conceptual learning at the expense of skills-based education is one that has been acknowledged globally, including here in Australia (see Luckman and Andrew 2020). Mentors especially have lamented this shift and noted its flow-on effects in the making community in terms of a drop in standards and skills, and greater demands being placed on more experienced artists to undertake what they see as remedial work i.e. that which ‘corrects’ a lack of knowledge that formal university or TAFE study should have provided. While the issue is beyond the scope of Catapult, it is nevertheless an important part of the larger creative ecology it operates within. Moreover, it again points to the ongoing gratitude Catapult participants have for this program.

Moving forward, in addition to the need identified on the previous page for further research into what more inclusive mentorship models and practices might look like, the project has two additional policy-oriented suggestions which have emerged from the COVID-19 experience.

Firstly, as borders continue to reopen, several research participants suggested now would be an ideal time to support residencies bringing international artists to Australia (notwithstanding the backlog of people wishing or needing to travel overseas to extend their professional development). This would enable more locals to benefit from their expertise and time as one way to make limited resources stretch further, at least in the short-term.

Secondly, even though it was not a focus of this research project, enough evidence started to emerge in this study to indicate the productive value of offering a social security safety net to artists. For a number of our participants JobKeeper effectively functioned as a default experiment in what might happen should Australia adopt a UBI (Universal Basic Income) for creatives. The answer according to this study: more time to make art, refine websites and business plans, experiment, and create in new ways, work on marketing, self-educate via YouTube, and upskill through mentorships. The equivalent of start-up development support and hothousing for sole traders engaged in creative practice, the lessons from this enforced experiment that nobody wanted to be part of are too good an opportunity to waste as we seize the opportunity to build back better.

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This mentorship changed my life and career. It is so very important to create this kind of exchange between peers, at all stages of their practice, for growth and development.

Catapult Mentee

Sam Gold
River Bed
2019
Photograph
Jordan Fowler



