

Facts about the Arts
Publication no 33
Arts Council of Finland
Helsinki 2004

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From visual and media training to the labour market

Survey on the situation of graduates

English summary

Background and aims

This publication reports the findings of a survey focusing on graduates from secondary and polytechnic level education in the fields of audiovisual media and fine arts (graduation years 2000–2002). The survey carried out in autumn 2003 examined the occupational and labour market structure of students after graduation. The study is a part of the Arts Council project “Professional training of artists”. The objective of the project is to produce an overall picture of the effects and structure of artists' professional training and the changes which have taken place in this field of education over the past decades. The project follows the one carried out at the Research Unit of the Arts Council in the 1990s, when university level training of artists was studied.

Since the aim of the project is to go through all art fields, it was decided that the first survey would concentrate on graduates of audiovisual media, graphic design and fine arts. The reason for this was that the intake of students in these degree programmes has increased faster than in other fields of art and culture education. Thus, the discussion on the relation between training and employment has also been quite active. The motive for connecting the three – rather different – fields stems from the system of professional training, since in official titles of degree programmes these areas are usually combined.

The data

The data was collected through a mail questionnaire directed to those who have taken a degree in audiovisual media and fine arts⁴⁹. Information about the graduates (name, date of birth, graduation year) was collected from educational institutions, and a total of 22 institutions delivered their list of graduates. Of these institutions, 13 were secondary level vocational institutions and 9 polytechnics. After updating the addresses, a total of 900 persons received the questionnaire. The response rate was 60 % and no marked bias was found between the original population and the respondents.

Main findings

Characteristics of respondents

The respondents form a group of over 500 persons who represent fine arts⁵⁰, audiovisual media and graphic design. Because the information received from the institutions usually included only the name of the degree programme – rather general in its content – the distribution into subgroups was done during the research process by using the information derived from the respondents' answers.

The majority of the respondents are women with the exception of audiovisual media, where the share of men is 53 %. The respondents are mostly between 25 and 35 years of age. The field of audiovisual media has the highest share of those under 25 years. In fine arts, the respondents are slightly older than in the other groups.

Nearly half of the respondents live in the Uusimaa region, but it seems that those who study in the other parts of Finland are likely to stay in their study region.

About 50 % of the respondents have studied art and media earlier and almost one fourth have continued with their studies after graduation. The proportion of those continuing with their studies is highest among fine artists (40 %).

49 The degree programmes in question are, among others, Degree Programme in Visual Arts and Communication, DP in audiovisual communication, DP in media production.

50 The term fine arts refers to professionals such as painters and sculptors.

Table 1. The characteristics of respondents

	Audiovisual media	Graphic design	Fine arts	All
Women %	47 %	66 %	74 %	60 %
Average age	29	28	31	29
Lives in Uusimaa region*	45 %	59 %	30 %	44 %
Secondary level degree	52 %	41 %	33 %	43 %
Polytechnic degree	48 %	59 %	67 %	57 %
Studies before art and media training	46 %	44 %	46 %	46 %
Studies after graduation from art and media training	17 %	14 %	40 %	23 %
<i>N</i>	238	140	167	545
Share in %	44	26	30	100

* Uusimaa is the province which includes the metropolitan area. This province has the highest population in Finland.

Labour market situation of respondents

The labour market situation of the respondents was clarified by asking about, their current labour market status and jobs, their working history and unemployment periods.

Table 2. The labour market status of respondents (% of choices)

Status	Audiovisual media %	Graphic design %	Fine arts %	All %
Employee	56	71	49	58
Freelancer	25	21	15	21
Unemployed	19	6	26	18
Student	13	11	31	18
Independent artist	5	*	37	14
Other	8	8	11	9
Entrepreneur	9	11	*	8
On grant	*	–	*	1
<i>N</i>	238	140	167	545

The sum does not add up to 100 % since the respondents have chosen many alternatives.

*Fewer than five persons.

As can be seen from Table 2, a majority of respondents are employed at the moment, but the differences between art forms are quite considerable. For example, over 70 % of graphic designers are employed while the share

among fine artists is under half. The figures include all kinds of jobs, not only those in the arts⁵¹. The proportion of unemployed is highest in the field of fine arts and lowest among graphic designers. The share of students is highest among fine artists.

Although the share of those working as employees is considerably high, these jobs are not always in the sector in which respondents have received their education. This became clear by asking the main income sources of respondents (Table 3). The work corresponding with the training is the main income source for only about one fifth of fine artists, while a great majority of graphic designers receive their primary income from the work they are trained for, and about half of those in audiovisual media (including media designers, radio and TV journalists etc.) have jobs corresponding with their training. What draws attention is the fact that the share of those with income from sources other than work (unemployment allowance, family allowance, study grant) is rather high (32 %), especially among fine artists (45 %).

Table 3. The main income sources of respondents (% of quotes)

Source of income	Audiovisual media %	Graphic design %	Fine arts %	All %
Work corresponding to training	48	77	22	49
Other income sources	33	17	45	32
Work in field other than art	18	11	22	17
Art-related work	13	–	30	14
<i>N</i>	232	139	144	515

The sum does not add up to 100 % since the respondents have chosen many alternatives.

Graduates in audiovisual media usually work in radio/TV or cinema/video productions. Graphic designers are employed, for example, by advertising companies or printing houses. Fine artists are an exceptional group since they do not have jobs in the strict sense of the word. The only way of "employing" oneself as an artist is to give exhibitions, sell art works or get grants. Since these activities do not necessarily produce sufficient income, many fine artists work as teachers, illustrators or completely outside the art world.

Concerning the means of recruitment, the data indicates that the most important way of getting a job is through one's own initiative and personal contacts⁵². Official means of employment (such as employment offices) are insignificant in this respect.

51 The quality of work (whether it is in the art sector or outside) is presented in Tables 4 and 5.

52 This result also refers to all kinds of jobs, not only artistic ones.

Table 4. The lines of work of respondents

Line of work	Audiovisual media %	Graphic design %	Fine arts %	All %
Work corresponding with training	45	73	17	44
Art-related work**	11	4	23	13
Other work	18	6	14	13
Mixed	7	*	17	9
Not working***	19	14	29	21
	100	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	238	140	167	545

*Fewer than five persons.

** Teaching, journalism, etc.

*** Unemployed, student, parental leave, etc.

Table 5. The means of getting present job (% of quotes)

Means of getting job	Audiovisual media %	Graphic design %	Fine arts %	All %
Own initiative	42	41	34	40
Contacts	31	33	38	33
Employers' initiative	28	11	30	24
Advertisement in newspaper/internet	16	17	17	17
Other means	11	13	8	11
Employment office	3	*	8	4
<i>N</i>	172	109	92	373

The sum does not add up to 100 % since the respondents have chosen many alternatives.

* Fewer than five persons.

Table 6. The unemployment of respondents after graduation

Unemployment	Audiovisual media %	Graphic design %	Fine arts %	All %
No unemployment periods	40	57	33	42
One unemployment period	35	32	37	35
Two unemployment periods	11	8	15	11
Three or more unemployment periods	14	4	16	12
	100	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	235	138	163	536

When the survey was conducted, altogether 18 % of the respondents were unemployed. The highest unemployment rate was among fine artists (26 %) and the lowest among graphic designers (6 %). However, the share

of those who had experienced unemployment at some point of their career was much higher (nearly 60 %). Fine artists are, once again, a group which stands out from the rest by the highest number of unemployment periods.

The total duration of unemployment⁵³ was not very long since 40 % of the unemployed had been without work less than six months.

Opinions about training

The opinions about the content of training were examined through questions dealing with the expectations concerning training, merits and deficiencies in their training as well as respondents' ideas about the development of professional training in this field. It became evident that over 50 % of the respondents considered their training as corresponding to their expectations. Only 3 % stated that there was no correspondence at all (Table 7).

When it comes to merits and shortcomings, the same factor was at the top of both lists, namely, contacts with working life. This indicates that for the students the main goal of training is to learn a trade and familiarise themselves with the world of this trade.

Table 7. The correspondence between expectations and training

Training & expectations	Audiovisual media %	Graphic design %	Fine arts %	All %
Training corresponded to expectations	12	16	14	13
Training mostly corresponded to expectations	46	46	52	48
Training partly corresponded to expectations	38	36	34	36
Training did not correspond to expectations at all	4	*	*	3
	100	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	237	139	166	542

* Fewer than five persons.

Many (54 %) of the respondents also made general remarks on their training, such as educational standards. According to them, some teachers did not have enough expertise as regards the labour market and real working life. About one third of the respondents commented on the amount of art and media training and all of them suggested that the intake to training should be reduced because of the present employment situation.

53 Respondents' own estimation of the duration of their unemployment.

Conclusion

According to this data, it seems that the situations of professionals in the three groups (audiovisual media, graphic design, fine arts) presented here differ from each other, sometimes to a large extent. Recognition of these differences is essential when making decisions on, for example, the amount of training.

The data shows that many graduates work in the field corresponding to their training. The main exception from this rule was the group of fine artists. Only a small proportion of them earn a living from artistic work. They also suffer from unemployment more than the other respondents. The employment situation of graphic designers seemed in general brighter than that of the other groups. On the other hand, graduates in every field – even fine artists – consider their training and especially their degree as a useful tool in dealing with employment.

Some criticism was expressed regarding the content of the training. This included insufficient contacts with employers, international connections and exchange programmes.

When comparing the situation and opinions of these graduates with other fields, it seems that art and media graduates have some characteristics which separate them from the others. For example, art and media graduates have already studied the field, they continue their studies more often, they are recruited more often through personal relations and they are more critical of their professional training than others.

In this research, the educational levels of polytechnics and secondary level vocational education were discussed together. The two levels were combined because of the viewpoint of the research, i.e., the focus being on employment and the significance of training in relation to that. Not many significant differences between educational levels were found in this respect.

Speaking of professional training in the arts, one crucial question is whether there is an oversupply of art and media graduates or not. According to this data, the results on employment seem to indicate that the intake of students in these fields is too high, especially in the fields of fine arts and audiovisual media. In fact, the education authorities have already decided to gradually reduce the amount of education in cultural degree programmes. However, instead of automatically reducing all education in the cultural degree programmes, it should be taken into consideration that the degree programmes of culture or art include many different occupational groups with very different situations in the labour market. An example of this is the group of graphic designers, whose situation is relatively satisfactory, and there is no indication in the data of a need for decreasing the amount of education in this field.