

## Non-Technical Summary

# Working for fun? The impact of employment in the arts sector on wellbeing

### Purpose

*Working for fun?* investigates the impact of employment in the arts sector on wellbeing in New Zealand. This research report was commissioned by Toi Mai Workforce Development Council and undertaken by Motu Economic & Public Policy Research. *Working for fun?* explores whether the wellbeing of arts professionals – derived from being able to do the work they love – could be one reason why some people stay in the arts labour market despite the prospect of lower pay.

### Research Questions

The key topics covered in this research are:

- **determining whether arts workers earn less than other workers in New Zealand**
  - If so, how much of this gap can be explained by differences in observed demographic and job-related characteristics (for example, ethnicity, sex, qualifications and hours worked)?
- **exploring the relationship between arts employment and wellbeing in New Zealand**, while holding constant the influence of differences in income and other relevant variables.

### Key Findings

## ***Being an arts worker is associated with higher life satisfaction compared to non-arts workers***

Being an arts worker is associated with higher life satisfaction compared to non-arts workers. The additional wellbeing could help explain why only people who gain sufficiently high wellbeing from artistic involvement stay in the artistic labour market despite the prospect of lower pay.

Research consistently shows that income has a positive effect on wellbeing. For arts workers, labour income has a positive impact on life satisfaction; however, this impact is more pronounced for non-arts workers. Research indicates that, to some extent, higher life satisfaction is partly attributed to arts employment.

It's important to note that income remains a crucial factor for security, especially given the limited opportunity for employment continuity often associated with arts professions. Total income (which includes other sources of income) does not

impact the wellbeing of either arts or non-arts workers, while also having no direct relationship with job satisfaction.

This suggests that when income is linked to personal work effort, arts workers appear to prioritise artistic engagement, while still recognising the importance of income. **All other things being equal, being an arts worker is associated with higher life satisfaction.** Given the inclusion of numerous control variables, it can be inferred that the higher life satisfaction of arts workers is at least partly attributable to the arts employment itself rather than, for example, arts workers being more educated or experiencing the autonomy that comes from being self-employed.

## ***However, arts workers on average earned around 20% less than non-arts workers, largely due to working fewer hours***

In 2019, arts workers in New Zealand earned about 20% less on average than non-arts workers. Around two-thirds of this gap can be explained by comparing observed characteristics (such as employment type, sex and working hours) between the two groups. Job characteristics explain more of this gap than demographic characteristics. For example, if arts workers worked as many hours per week as non-arts workers, the gap would be almost halved.

This gap may be exacerbated by the fact that arts workers are more likely to be self-employed, a characteristic associated with lower income overall. These aspects indicate underemployment for arts workers and might reflect a range of factors that constrains arts workers from working more hours when they would like to, including limited opportunities.

### **Limitations**

While we are confident of the findings for higher wellbeing for arts workers, the results are subject to some limitations. There may be unobserved characteristics that are not controlled that drive the relationship between arts employment and wellbeing.

### **What are the wellbeing measures?**

For this research, the wellbeing measures are subjective and include life satisfaction, job satisfaction, mental wellbeing and sense of purpose.

## Which arts workers are included?

The definition of arts workers has followed previous studies and is defined as someone whose primary occupation is arts related. The broad list of 90 arts-related occupations includes both traditional arts roles (such as actor, painter or musician) and contemporary arts roles (such as sound technician, content creator or web designer).

## Next steps

This research aids Toi Mai in developing a further understanding and narrative of our sectors on areas with historic gaps in knowledge.

Toi Mai has ongoing research in the following areas:

- impact on subjective wellbeing from leisurely participation in arts and cultural activities
- understanding funding and funding flows of the sectors
- a workforce development plan for the performing arts.