

Graduate Profile Report - Circus Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Why?

In 2019 our country lost its only tertiary circus program. As a representative of education for ANZCA I have been approached by the industry to pursue the development of future circus education in Aotearoa. This graduate profile was developed as part of an initial advocacy phase to share perspectives from experienced kiwi performers that have engaged with circus education.

What is it?

This report provides an overview of a circus graduate profile questionnaire for Aotearoa/New Zealand based circus performers. This was developed as part of an advocacy project to help Toi Mai (The Workforce Development Council) develop a clearer understanding of the role tertiary circus programs have played in the past and to gain some perspectives regarding future qualifications.

The intention of this questionnaire was to gain personal, qualitative perspectives from a few established professionals from different areas of circus rather than a more broad quantitative approach.

Who was Involved?

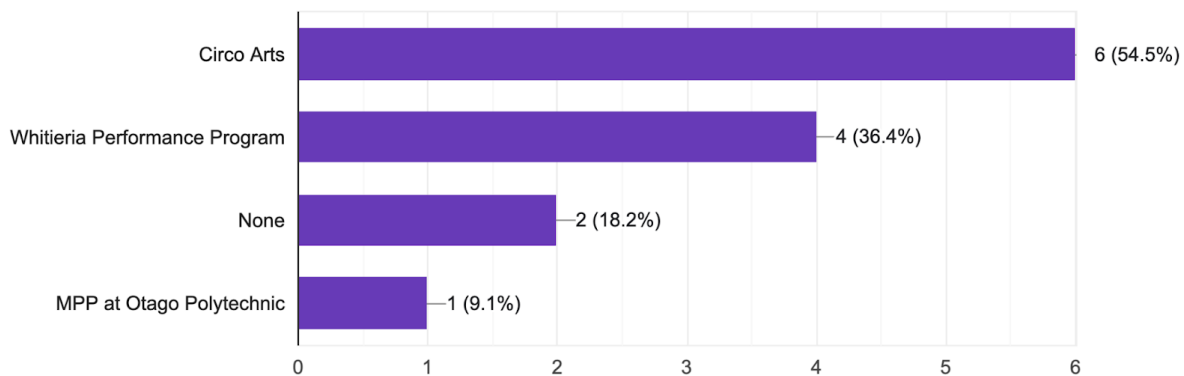
We approached a small group that we identified as having gone through a formal circus education (either here in New Zealand or overseas), and are currently (or at least very recently have been) working in the industry. Our goal was to have 10 responses. 11 people responded.

What Circus courses had they participated in?

Two of the participants of this course had left the country to participate in higher level circus training overseas. Below represents the courses offered in Aotearoa/New Zealand:

What circus courses have you participated in this country?

11 responses



Some Background on Courses

Circo Arts - Christchurch

Circo Arts offered professional training in circus, clowning and street performance with a team of internationally respected tutors. The course was housed in the Memorial Hall of the Christchurch Polytechnic. This course was closed due to the Christchurch earthquakes.

Whitireia Performance Program - Wellington (2015 - 2019)

Whitireia polytechnic developed a Diploma in Performing Arts (Dance) with a certificate in Circus. This program was closed in 2019 along with several other programs offered by Whitireia Polytechnic.

Spin Circus Academy - Australia

Spin Circus Academy offers a circus training intensive in Australia that started in 2012.

Experience and background:

The professional practice of graduates ranged from 2.5 to 30 years, the majority with over 10 years experience.

Graduates current life in circus includes:

- Performing overseas
- Working on independent projects
- Doing short tours around NZ and the world
- Teaching
- Operators of circus companies
- Entertainment rigging
- Choreography
- Design (e.g. costume and apparatus)

How has the qualification been useful?

Professionalism

Professionalism was highlighted as a common benefit from their course, ranging from getting a first contract, being useful in funding applications and being connected with the professional world.

Networking

Several participants mentioned the value of networking in their course. The networks formed between students led to future working collaborations as well as the course connecting students with performing opportunities.

Creation and skill acquisition

Some participants described learning methods for creation and learning processes for skill acquisition as beneficial for future developments.

Health and Safety

Being able to understand health and safety documentation and provide it for funding, gigs and council communications was highlighted. Learning about injury prevention and sustainability was also mentioned.

Training over Qualification

Several NZ based participants mentioned that it was the course content rather than the qualification that was of real use.

Issues to be addressed

Curriculum could be developed further

The most consistent suggestion for curriculum improvements was related to running an effective business. For example, how to effectively seek funding, marketing, invoicing etc.

No courses and no teachers

The majority of responses highlighted the lack of courses and corresponding lack of skilled teachers. This created barriers for many to progress to professionalism while staying in the country.

'There is currently a cycle of circus talent leaving NZ. As there is so little effective education available for budding circus professionals, many choose to travel to other countries for that training. Some return but many do not, as they are embedded in a new community and opportunities. Because few people stay or return to NZ, there are few teachers to pass on the skills and knowledge to the next generation of budding circus professionals. And so the cycle continues. Local support to provide the needed education and opportunities in NZ would go a long way towards breaking this cycle.'

Collaboration and cross-disciplinary interaction

Through the responses to this questionnaire was an underlying message that circus and its education does not and should not exist in isolation of the countries culture, identity and artistic community.

'How to come up with a style of Circus that is uniquely Aotearoan by acknowledging our history, especially the parts that make us uncomfortable. Combining Circus with te ao Māori is what I am most passionate about these days.'

Theatre and Dance were acknowledged as core relationships that should be nurtured for the development of circus and the countries performers.

'There needs to be cross discipline collaboration between national dance and drama schools to help build well rounded practitioners as these fundamentals help ensure a higher quality performer.'

Recommendations

Starting again

There was a general agreement amongst all that there is a need for a strong tertiary circus program in NZ. Some views ranging from just getting something simple started again, meeting the more localised needs of the kiwi performer, to meeting the higher technical and biomechanical standards of international programmes. Potential for doing this in city centres of Chirstchurch, Auckland and Wellington were expressed.

Attracting international trainers

Seeking ways to attract circus trainers from overseas and keep high skilled trainers in the country.

Curriculum Development

Participants wanted to see development upon programs that have previously existed. For some, it was suggested that this could start with exploring existing curriculums from overseas.

'I would recommend looking at curriculums from several circus schools overseas - there are also different types, youth circus, prep schools and diploma/universities, all with different entry requirements, classes, and course completion requirements.'

Throughout all of the questionnaire most participants said they wanted to see the development of more practical business skills.

'Considering developing a toolbox for being a working artist - finding your portfolio of income sources - which are often from a mix of teaching and performing. More practical skills. I found the creative and technical side met my needs, it's just how to translate the skills into income.'

Other comments suggesting the exploration of what is unique to circus in Aotearoa / New Zealand and our community (including acknowledgement of neurodivergence) were suggested as areas to explore for further developments.

Any Feedback?

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to give any feedback on how it is presented before I share it with Toi Mai (The Workforce Development Council).

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