

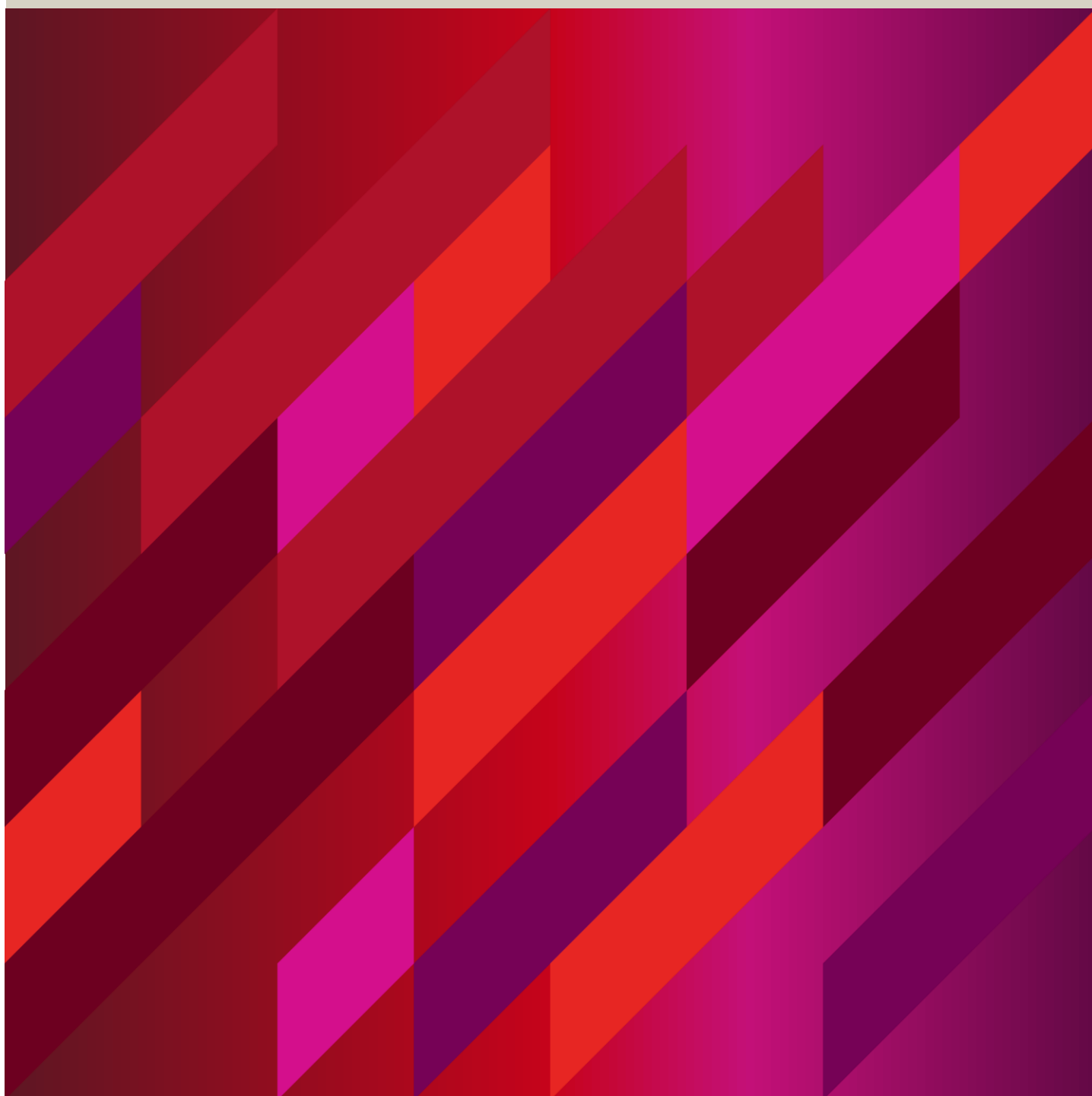


Australian authors

INDUSTRY BRIEF NO. 2: DEMOGRAPHICS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOK AUTHORS

The Australian book industry: Authors, publishers and readers in a time of change

October 2015



The Australian Book Industry: Authors, publishers and readers in a time of change' is a three-year research project led by Prof. David Throsby, funded by the Australian Research Council under Discovery Project grant DP 140101479 and Macquarie University. In February 2015 the researchers conducted an online survey of over 1,000 Australian book authors.

TOTAL NUMBER OF AUSTRALIAN BOOK AUTHORS

In the 2011 Australian census 4,283 people nominated "book author or script editor" as being their main occupation in the week prior to filling out the census questionnaire. For the purposes of this current survey, the figure is not sufficiently accurate because it includes script editors who have not published a book, and conversely, it does not include people who may have published a book but who did not list 'book author' as their main occupation. A 2010 survey of artists' income conducted for the Australia Council for the Arts estimated that there were approximately 7,600 practising professional writers in Australia in 2009, but some of these writers (e.g. playwrights) may not have published a book. In short, while we do not have an exact number for the population of Australian book authors, it is likely to be much higher than indicated by the Census data.

The Macquarie University survey was conducted online in February 2015. After validating the screening process and removing clearly questionable responses, rank outliers and those where important variables had missing values, the analysis is based on 993 responses from book authors who reside in Australia. Further detail about the survey methodology, including the survey questionnaire, is available in a working paper: Book Authors and their Changing Circumstances: Survey Method and Results. Section 8 of the working paper utilises the 2011 Census and a 2010 survey of artists' income to confirm that the sample generated for the present survey is a suitable and sufficient representation of the population of Australian book authors.

PROFESSIONAL STATUS

We asked authors to classify themselves as a "professional" (full- or part-time) or "semi-professional or serious amateur" writer. An additional category was added to allow for those who are professional in some other field where writing is an important output such as academics, journalists etc. Table 1 shows the proportion of authors in each professional status group as a percent within their genre. Only half of all authors see themselves as being a professional writer, with a quarter opting for the semi-professional category. A small number of authors (less than 7%) are unable to place themselves in any of the given categories. This group is likely to include individuals who have published books but who do not in fact see themselves as "writers", and those emerging writers who are not yet well enough developed to regard themselves as professional or even semi-professional.

The highest proportion of full-time professional authors is among genre fiction specialists, followed by children's and literary fiction. One quarter of all authors occupy a professional position in another field in which writing books is an important output.

Table 1 – Professional status: percent within each genre

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
Full-time professional	23.6	30.9	26.3	16.3	13.7	14.3	23.4	6.1	6.1	19.1
Part-time professional	36.0	38.7	40.4	27.6	30.5	29.8	35.1	26.5	6.1	30.9
Professional in another field	18.0	7.1	11.1	21.4	28.4	22.6	15.3	42.9	70.7	24.9
Semi-professional or serious amateur	18.0	19.1	20.2	27.6	23.2	22.6	21.2	10.9	9.1	18.4
None of the above	4.5	4.3	2.0	7.1	4.2	10.7	5.1	13.6	8.1	6.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	89	282	99	98	95	84	747	147	99	993



DEGREE OF ESTABLISHMENT IN CAREER AS A BOOK AUTHOR

We asked authors whether they consider themselves to be emerging, developing, established or established but working less intensively before as a stage in their career. These are standard categories and we assumed that in classifying themselves, authors used the conventions in the genre that they nominated as their specialisation.

Table 2 shows that approximately half the authors describe themselves as emerging or developing and half identify as being established or established but working less intensively than before. There are relatively fewer established writers amongst literary fiction authors in comparison to other trade authors, and substantially more established writers among educational and scholarly authors. This reflects the comparative security of employment of academics and teachers that enables them to maintain an established writing practice.

Table 1 – Degree of establishment as an author: percent within each genre

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
Emerging	20.2	26.2	19.2	15.3	21.1	10.7	20.7	12.9	10.1	18.5
Developing	48.3	34.0	30.3	31.6	31.6	40.5	35.3	13.6	18.2	30.4
Established	21.3	29.8	37.4	32.7	26.3	31.0	29.9	31.3	45.5	31.6
Established but working less intensively than before	6.7	9.6	11.1	18.4	17.9	11.9	11.9	38.1	23.2	16.9
None of the above	3.4	0.4	2.0	2.0	3.2	6.0	2.1	4.1	3.0	2.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	89	282	99	98	95	84	747	147	99	993

GENDER

Women make up about two thirds of the author population. When the researchers combined respondents who are full-time or part-time book authors, the gender mix is 66.8% female and 33.2% male. (In comparison, the ABS census data for “book author or script editor” is 65% female and 35% male). Table 3 shows the distribution of authors across genres, broken down by gender. Children’s writers are predominantly female while education and scholarly authors come the closest to an equal balance between the genders.

Table 3 – Authors’ most important genre, by gender: percent within each genre

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
Female	65.2	76.2	86.9	65.3	67.4	60.7	72.0	54.4	47.5	67.0
Male	34.8	23.8	13.1	34.7	32.6	39.3	28.0	45.6	52.5	33.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	89	282	99	98	95	84	747	147	99	993

AGE

Professional book authors are relatively old compared to Australia's population (half of book authors in the survey are aged 40-59 years, and nearly 40% are older). A summary of the age ranges is as follows:

12% of authors are 39 years or younger.

49.6% are 40 – 59 years.

24.9% are 60 – 69 years.

13.3% are 70 years or older.

Although the average age of authors in the survey is slightly older than in the 2011 ABS census, the distribution of age is a close match to the 2010 survey by Throsby and Zednik. One reason for the slightly older group of book authors could be due to our screening criterion, in which a writer needed to have had a book published to be eligible for the survey. The older age of authors may point to a possible misalignment between general media interest in new, emerging writers who tend to be younger and the reality that the majority of professional book authors are likely to be older, especially if they have successfully authored and published a number of books.

LOCATION OF RESIDENCE

Table 4 shows that, not surprisingly, the majority of authors live in New South Wales, followed by Victoria, consistent with the spread of Australia's general population. Over 60% of book authors live in a capital city, with an additional 20% located in a regional city or town. (A comparison with the 2011 ABC census is also provided. It's possible that the differences are because the current survey includes book authors who did not list this role as their main occupation in the week prior to filling out the 2011 census.)

Table 4: Current residence of authors in Australia: percent by State and Territory

	%	ABS %
NSW	35.0	44.7
VIC	28.3	29.1
QLD	13.4	11.1
SA	7.5	4.1
WA	7.4	4.7
TAS	2.7	1.8
NT	0.7	0.5
ACT	5.0	3.9
Total	100	100
<i>n</i>	993	

One feature of new communication technologies is the potential for authors to maintain stronger professional connections regardless of their location. In 2014 the researchers ran an online discussion forum in which several authors discussed this benefit, with two authors commenting:

It feels like much more of a global community. In that sense things feel more lively in some ways than they used to – I think of writers I used to know of my parents' generation and the isolation was far more intense.

My 'friends' include people I've met during residencies interstate or at writers' festivals and Facebook keeps us all connected, so that the isolation I have felt in the past, living outside a capital city, is now much less worrying.

In the survey half of all writers who live outside a capital city find that this has an impact on their practice as an author, with half of these assessing it as negative and nearly one third as positive.



LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Authors as a group have a markedly higher level of formal education than the population as a whole, with more than 80 percent having attended university (see Table 5). Nearly half of all authors have completed a postgraduate degree, with the highest proportion of educational qualifications held by scholarly writers. However, postgraduate qualifications are notable across all the genres. Just under 6 percent of writers hold a creative doctorate (these figures do not include authors who are currently studying towards a degree or a creative doctorate).

Table 5 – Highest level of education completed: percent within each genre

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
No schooling	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Completed Primary school	0.0	0.7	1.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.4
Completed High school or equivalent	4.5	12.8	12.1	7.1	4.2	4.8	9.0	0.7	0.0	6.9
Completed Trade Certificate/Associate Diploma/Advanced Diploma	4.5	15.2	13.1	10.2	16.8	8.3	12.5	4.8	0.0	10.1
Completed Bachelor Degree	23.9	27.7	30.3	6.1	22.1	20.2	23.2	23.1	2.0	21.1
Completed Postgraduate Diploma	9.1	14.5	20.2	14.3	11.6	15.5	14.3	21.8	2.0	14.2
Completed Postgraduate Degree	58.0	28.7	23.2	62.2	44.2	51.2	40.3	49.7	96.0	47.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	88	282	99	98	95	84	746	147	99	992

COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND FIRST LANGUAGE

Australian book authors are very likely to have been born in Australia or in another English-speaking country (Table 6).

Table 6 - Country of birth

	%
Australia	75.1
England	10.5
New Zealand	2.5
United States of America	2.9
South Africa	1.2
Ireland	1.0
Scotland	1.0
Other	5.8
Total	100
<i>n</i>	970

Table 7 shows that the vast majority of Australian book authors speak English as a first language (97%), suggesting that in Australia's multicultural society, second-generation or subsequent generations descended from non-English speaking immigrants are more likely to develop writing as a career than first-generation immigrants. By way of comparison, the 2011 ABS census found that 76.8% of Australians speak only English at home. There is no dominant second language in Australia (ABS 2012).

Table 7 – Is English your first language?

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
Yes	95.5	96.5	100.0	97.9	96.8	98.8	97.3	97.9	93.9	97.1
No	4.5	3.5	0.0	2.1	3.2	1.2	2.7	2.1	6.1	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	89	282	98	97	95	84	745	146	99	990

The highest proportion of book authors who do not speak English as a first language are scholarly, literary fiction, genre fiction and other non-fiction authors. However the overall numbers are modest.

AUTHORSHIP IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

We also asked authors whether they have written a book in a language other than English (Table 8). Twenty authors responded yes, especially poets (3.6% of all poets), creative non-fiction and scholarly authors. No one language other than English predominates, with the responses including French (7 authors), German (4 authors), Spanish, Portugese, Japanese, and Bahasa Indonesia (2 authors).

Table 8 – Have you ever written a book in any other languages?

	Literary	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-fiction	Other Non-fiction	Poetry	Sub-total (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (All authors)
Yes	2.3	1.4	1.0	3.1	2.1	3.6	2.0	2.1	3.1	2.1
No	97.7	98.2	99.0	96.9	97.9	95.2	97.7	97.9	95.9	97.6
Unsure	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.3	0.0	1.0	0.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	87	281	97	96	95	83	739	146	98	983

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Australian authors are generally highly educated and tend to be 40 years or older, perhaps reflecting the time and experience that is required for many authors to develop a track record of publication. In most genres it is a female-prevalent profession. The majority of authors live in capital cities, and it's possible that new communications technologies are assisting authors who reside in other parts of Australia to maintain stronger connections within their profession. A very high proportion of authors speak English as a first language, and at this stage only a small proportion of authors (2%) have written and published a work in a language other than English. As alternative publishing and distribution channels develop, it will be interesting to observe whether opportunities for book authorship in other languages increase and whether it is possible for authors to achieve significant impact (in terms of readerships, sales or critical recognition) through these channels, within the context of Australia's mainstream English-language industry.

This industry brief is part of a series prepared for Australian book authors and other members of the Australian book industry to highlight key findings of the 2015 survey.

Thank you to all the authors who gave generously of their time and expertise by participating.

The complete series of industry briefs about this survey is:

1. Key Findings
2. Demographics of Australian Book Authors
3. Authors' Income
4. Changes in the Financial Position of Australian Book Authors
5. Authors' Changing Professional Practices
6. Authors' Allocation of Time
7. Rights Sales, Translations and Piracy
8. Promotion
9. Authors and Publishers

See also the Department of Economics Working Paper, 'Book Authors and their Changing Circumstances: Survey Method and Results'.

These can be downloaded at:

<http://goto.mq.edu.au/book-industry>

