

Building Bridges, Not Falling Through Cracks: what we have learned during ten years of Australian Digital Visual Effects Traineeships Speaker: Dr. Shilo T. McClean

Australia's New South Wales FTO is a state government body chartered with the task of developing the film and television industries and promoting industrial growth for film & TV businesses based in New South Wales. When the transition from analogue to digital gained momentum in the mid-1990s, there was an imperative to help artists from other media cross-train to take up the new opportunities arising at that time and find ways to bring people with very limited experience with digital tools up to speed. Since then, there has been substantial growth in both educational programs and employment opportunities. The industry is well-served by formal courses, online mentorship and training programs, professional associations, and many formalized internship arrangements. Similarly, a new generation of artists has come to the industry with high levels of digital literacy. The industry itself has developed sophisticated production practices and infrastructure. It has grown to encompass areas of specialization and developed standards of professionalism that compare favourably, and indeed, exceed those of many fields with longer histories.

The experience in building an industry during the 'digital revolution' is one of the things that makes DVFX especially valuable as a case study in strategy and planning for innovation in the 21st Century. There are many qualities and practices that have emerged from this experience that provide us with information that can be generalized to guide change management and plan for continued success in digital creative industries — including our own. These qualities reflect the values of emerging digital online cultures and workplaces that are grounded in collaborative practice.

The FTO's traineeship initiative has monitored the changes both in the training and experience that applicants bring to the placement but the kinds of needs that exist for studios seeking to take on a trainee. Throughout this time there also have been fluctuations in industry reflecting demands for full CG or live action effects skills needed relative to the kinds of productions moving through the various pipelines.

It is this need for innovation as a native state coupled the qualities of resilience and responsiveness as embedded processes that makes DVFX an exemplar of the industries that will thrive into the future. Yet as the DVFX/CG industry matures, there is a risk that a new status quo will arise introducing rigidity and strictures that will slow its growth and impede innovation. This is likely to be influenced by emerging factors of economic and social upheaval and impact upon the industry in terms of availability of capital for investment (particularly for R&D initiatives), access to education and entry level positions for newcomers to the industry, and infrastructure development.

The interconnectedness of education, employment, infrastructure and innovation needs to be uppermost in our strategies for ensuring that the industry's achievements continue and become more thoroughly embedded in, and a substantial contributor to, the ongoing transition to a world where digital and visual literacy is as crucial as numeracy and language skills. This analysis of the operation of the FTO Scheme provides some key qualities and strengths that can help guide plans for continued success.