



Australian Screen Production Education  
and Research Association

# Diversity On and Off Screen in Australian Film Schools

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Commissioned by the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA) Executive Committee

Developed by members of the Australian Screen Production and Education Research Association (ASPERA) Research Sub-Committee. The report is authored by Associate Professor Marsha Berry, RMIT University; Dr Kath Dooley, Curtin University; and Margaret McHugh, University of Technology Sydney; with support from Professor Craig Batty and Dr Bettina Frankham, University of Technology Sydney; Dr Margaret McVeigh, Griffith Film School; and Professor James Verdon, Swinburne University of Technology.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the results of a national survey measuring levels of diversity on screen and behind the camera in 2019 Australian university capstone or culminating screen production units. The report was commissioned by the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA) and was designed and implemented by members of its Research Sub-Committee, for the benefit of the ASPERA community in Australia and other screen/media education and research communities internationally.

The survey comprised two sections. The first section gathered general information on capstone courses, such as the number of students in the cohort, the breakdown of gender within the cohort, duration of the capstone program and the degree within which it is contained. Instructors then answered a series of qualitative questions, commenting on the cultural diversity of the cohort, the way that student projects are crewed, and how the subject of diversity on screen and behind the camera is addressed within the unit and in the wider degree program. This section also called for instructor suggestions on how issues related to gender and diversity might be addressed in the curriculum, teaching approaches and through the student production process in future.

The second section of the survey involved the collection of quantitative data in relation to gender diversity within student crews, and on screen in the capstone projects. For every reported project, instructors were asked to record the gender of the director, writer, producer, cinematographer, production designer, editor, sound designer and composer. Instructors also recorded the gender, cultural background and principal language spoken by the main character/s, as well as the disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity (if known/defined). In the case of multiple main characters, a 'mixed' response could be recorded and further details entered. Where appropriate, instructors were also able to select 'unknown' or 'not specified' as a response.

Email invitations containing a link to the survey were sent to identified contacts at 19 film schools and other institutions offering screen production programs across Australia in November 2019. Data were received from 17 universities and/or TEQSA accredited film schools, 14 of which are current ASPERA members. A total of 21 capstone units were reported upon (17 Undergraduate, 4 postgraduate), with data captured relating to 182 capstone projects (141 undergraduate, 41 postgraduate).

The survey results reveal that, firstly, while close to even numbers of male and female students are completing capstone projects at film schools, crew roles are indeed gendered. The skew towards a particular gender is most pronounced in the roles of cinematographer and sound designer (male dominated) and producer and production designer (female dominated). Other roles, while less skewed, also show a larger percentage of males occupying them. Instructor comments suggest that the majority of student crews are self-formed by students (featuring members from within and/or outside of the capstone cohort) or achieved through a pitching or interview process, with no examples given of direct intervention to ensure gender diversity in student production teams.

Secondly, the survey results reveal that diversity on screen in capstone projects is limited. While there is an even split of male and female lead characters in capstone student projects, the diversity of characters is low or minimal in the other categories surveyed (cultural background, principal language spoken, disability status, sexual orientation). Notably, there are higher levels of cultural diversity on screen evident in postgraduate projects than in undergraduate projects. This may reflect the typically higher percentage of international students in the postgraduate cohort.

All respondents stated that students at their institution are able to access subjects/units/capstones in which diversity issues are addressed explicitly. The majority of respondents acknowledged a move across universities and across industry to discuss and increase inclusion and diversity, and that this had led to changes within units/courses. A majority of respondents also stated their belief that current cultural movements such as #metoo, #OscarsSoWhite and Gender Matters (Australia) have influenced student production processes.

When asked for feedback or suggestions on how issues of gender and diversity could be addressed in the curriculum, respondents primarily answered in three ways:

- Ensure discussion to ensure students are aware of their own built-in prejudices
- Overt curriculum design that covers these topics
- Include diverse texts

When asked for feedback or suggestions on how issues of gender and diversity could be addressed in student production processes or teaching approaches, respondents primarily answered in three ways:

- Ensure that students are aware of their own and others prejudices
- Direct intervention in class by teachers
- Introduce individual formative assessments so that all students are able to get their hands on film equipment, to reduce the technical intimidation that can occur

It is hoped that these data can provide the grounds for further research and the introduction of measures to address diversity at film schools, and in the Australian screen industries going forward.

While the ASPERA survey provides significant data in regard to levels of diversity associated with Australian capstone projects in 2019, further research could involve greater study of both undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts across a number of years, so as to provide longitudinal data and to further ascertain patterns and divergences. Data has not been collected from students, as this was outside the scope of the ASPERA project, but such data could provide more insight into decisions around crew role selection and the identification of diversity on screen.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, individuals and groups from inside and outside of academia have called for greater diversity on screen. In particular, the gender imbalance that exists on screen and behind the camera has been a particular point of focus. This report outlines the results of a national survey measuring levels of diversity on screen and behind the camera in 2019 Australian university capstone or culminating screen production units. The report was commissioned by the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA) and was designed and implemented by members of its Research Sub-Committee, for the benefit of the ASPERA community in Australia and other screen/media education and research communities internationally. This work follows on from research conducted by various bodies in Australia and abroad to identify gender imbalances on and off screen, and to establish the nature of diversity in contemporary storytelling (see New York Film Academy 2018; Screen Australia 2015).

ASPERA represents Australian tertiary institutions offering qualifications at undergraduate and/or postgraduate levels, including bachelor, master and doctoral degrees in various screen production disciplines. Full membership of ASPERA is open to Australian universities, the Australian Film, Television & Radio School (AFTRS), or academic units within a university (faculty, school, department, institute or college) responsible for the teaching and management of screen production and/or research programs where the central objective is the education and advancement of screen practitioners. A university or academic unit as defined above can join ASPERA if one third of its subjects are production based.

As the peak body for university-based screen production in Australia, ASPERA hosts an annual conference for academics working in the discipline, which focuses on teaching, learning and research. The levels of diversity evident within student crews and on screen in student films has been a long-standing concern for ASPERA. In the wake of the #metoo movement, panel discussions held at the annual ASPERA conference at the Victorian College of Arts (VCA) in 2017 and at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in 2018 saw concerns raised by instructors and industry practitioners alike in regard to the seemingly gendered nature of some crew roles. Anecdotal accounts of struggles to address this issue, as well as related problems such as gender-based discrimination between students, suggested the need for further research in this area.

In response, ASPERA decided to implement a survey that could provide some concrete data regarding the issues outlined above, by asking instructors of capstone screen production units in Australia to report data on the gender of students occupying various crew roles within their units in 2019. The survey also measures the levels of diversity evident in the stories being told in the capstone projects. By undertaking this work, ASPERA takes an active role in shaping the quality of screen production education in Australia. It is hoped that this data can provide the grounds for further research and the introduction of measures to address diversity at film schools, and in the Australian screen industries going forward.

## BACKGROUND

### Australian Film Industry Profile

Since the 1970s, the Australian film and television industry has experienced steady growth in the production of screen content. Australian feature films, specifically, have increasingly enjoyed success and recognition in national and international contexts. As with most national screen industries, there are two main sectors, television and feature film, that provide the majority of production and employment opportunities. In 2016, the Australian audiovisual industries<sup>1</sup> employed 41,500 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) although it is important to note that a high proportion of those employed within the industry are working on temporary contracts and/or as freelancers.

Issues of gender inequality in the Australian film industry has been well surveyed and reported on since the 1980s (Ryan et al 1983; Marsh and Pip 1987; Cox and Laura 1992; French 2012, 2014; Verhoeven et al 2018). However, despite key recommendations produced from these reports being advocated to industry gatekeepers and screen funding bodies, little has changed. When reviewing the percentage of women working in 'Film & video production/post-production services', which is the primary sector of the industry Australian film school educated students aim to enter, issues in gender parity are evident with men employed at 65% compared to women at 35% (Screen Australia, 2020a). Gender inequality significantly increases when reviewing employment statistics in key creative roles: director - film, TV, radio or stage (men 78%, women 22%) director of photography (men 94%, women 5%) and editor (men 75%, women 26%) (Screen Australia, 2020b). In 2015, Screen Australia released the Gender Matters (2015) funding initiative, which aimed to address gender inequality in key creative roles and allocated \$5 million over three years (2015-2018) towards supporting the development of 45 female-driven stories (Brilliant Stories) and 13 female-driven businesses (Brilliant Careers).

Diversity on screen and behind the camera is an issue that is gaining increased interest through academic and industry debate (AFTRS 2016; Screen Australia 2016), particularly since social movements such as #Oscarsowhite brought issues of diversity on screen to broader public discussion. The Australian population is hugely multicultural and diverse yet the 'overwhelming majority of Australia's screen practitioners and decision makers continue to be white and able-bodied and in the senior levels of the industry, men' (AFTRS 2016).

### Australian Film School Profile

Screen production 'majors' at universities and film schools in Australia are generally contained within three-year degree programs and two-year masters-by-coursework programs that focus on the craft and workflows of screen production. Undergraduate programs have a mix of practical courses focussing on craft aspects of screen production and theoretical humanities courses. Master programs tend to be focused more on skill acquisition and industry knowledge and insight.

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<sup>1</sup> The ABS survey of the audiovisual industries uses the following categories; film and video production and post-production services, film and video distribution, film exhibition, television broadcasting, video hire and not further defined audiovisual categories (ABS, 2016)

Typically, both undergraduate and postgraduate programs have capstone courses/units where students gain valuable industry experience. A capstone unit is one that has a hands-on focus where students usually work in teams and take on the various film production roles that reflect the industry. Students produce a culminating project that addresses a specific project brief or problem. The capstone project functions as a showcase where students are able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge as applied to a practical context. They can use the films produced in capstone units as an important part of their professional portfolios. The capstone units may be conducted over one, two or three semesters in undergraduate degrees and are generally conducted over one semester in postgraduate programs.

The recent ‘Women Below the Line’ report, commissioned by Screen Australia and produced by Caris Bizacca (2019), provides substantial evidence to show that despite the numbers of females enrolled in and graduating from screen production programs in film schools and universities being somewhat even to males, gender discrepancies are present, particularly outside the roles of writer, producer, director. ‘Women Below the Line’ examined programs at four institutions with major film schools, with a focus on cinematography and animation.

Cara Nash (2019), in a recent article about women in the film schools, interviewed Professor Trish FitzSimons from Griffith Film School (Griffith University, Brisbane), who similarly observed that the ratio of male to female students is “around even numbers these days”, but who notes that “Camera and Directing are the two areas in particular to which more males than females gravitate.”

In order to examine these important findings with regard to gender roles in finer granularity, ASPERA conducted a national survey of major Australian university and film schools offering screen production courses and degrees that have an emphasis on filmmaking practices. The ASPERA survey builds on this earlier research by also specifically exploring diversity and gender through onscreen representations and narratives.



## METHOD

The ASPERA survey, titled ‘Diversity in the Screen Production Classroom,’ was designed and delivered using Qualtrics software. Empirical research for the project was approved by Curtin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, project number HRE2019-0743. Data relating to individual universities and capstone productions have been de-identified.

The first section of the survey sought to gather general information on the capstone course for which data was to be entered, covering the number of students in the cohort, the breakdown of gender within the cohort, duration of the capstone program and the degree within which it operates. Instructors then answered a series of qualitative questions, commenting on their knowledge of the cultural diversity of the cohort, the way that student projects are crewed and how the subject of diversity on screen and behind the camera is addressed within the unit and in the wider degree program. This section also called for instructor suggestions on how issues related to gender and diversity might be addressed in the curriculum, teaching approaches and through the student production process in future.

The second section of the survey involved the collection of quantitative data in relation to gender diversity within student crews, and on screen in the capstone projects. For every reported project, instructors were asked to record the gender of the director, writer, producer, cinematographer, production designer, editor, sound designer and composer. They also recorded the gender, cultural background and principal language spoken by the main character/s, as well as the disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity. In the case of multiple main characters, a ‘mixed’ response could be recorded and further details entered. Where appropriate, instructors were also able to select ‘unknown’, or ‘not specified’ as a response.

In November 2019, email invitations containing the link to the survey were sent to identified contacts at 19 film schools or qualifying institutions across Australia. These contacts were asked to identify the relevant capstone projects within their respective institutions, and to respond to the survey before the end of the year.

Data was received from 17 universities and/or TEQSA-accredited film schools across Australia, 14 of whom are current ASPERA members:

- Australian Catholic University, various locations
- Australian Film, Television and Radio School, NSW
- Bond University, QLD
- Charles Sturt University, NSW
- Curtin University, WA
- Deakin University, VIC
- Edith Cowan University, WA
- Flinders University, SA

- Griffith Film School, QLD
- Macquarie University, NSW
- Queensland University of Technology, QLD
- RMIT University, VIC
- Swinburne University of Technology, VIC
- University of Canberra, ACT
- University of Newcastle, NSW
- University of Melbourne (Victorian College of the Arts), VIC
- University of Technology Sydney, NSW

Number of capstone units surveyed:

- 17 undergraduate
- 4 postgraduate

Number of capstone projects reported on:

- 141 undergraduate
- 41 postgraduate

Please see the appendix for a full list of survey questions.

### **Project Limitations**

While the survey provides significant data in regards to levels of diversity associated with Australian capstone projects in 2019, there are some limitations that must be noted.

Firstly, of the 21 total respondents, three supplied qualitative data only (one at postgraduate and two at undergraduate level). This further limits the dataset related to postgraduate capstone offerings, with this being indicative of three capstone production units across two institutions only. By contrast, the undergraduate data is indicative of 15 capstone production units across 14 institutions. Further research could involve greater study of both cohorts, across a number of years so as to provide longitudinal data and to further ascertain patterns and divergences.

Secondly, the survey respondents are primarily course leaders or instructors of capstone units. Thus, there is inherent bias in their answers to both qualitative and quantitative questions. Data has not been collected from students, as this was outside the scope of the ASPERA project, but such data could provide more insight into decisions around crew role selection and the identification of diversity on screen.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

### **About the capstone units**

Of the 17 institutions that responded to the survey, 15 are universities, one is a dedicated film school not affiliated with a university, and one is a film school affiliated with a university. A full list of respondents is available in the Method section.

The 17 reported undergraduate capstone units are contained within film/television/screen production majors within a number of different Bachelor degrees, including a Bachelor of Communications (3), Bachelor of Arts (2), Bachelor of Screen Production (2), Bachelor of Film and Television (2) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (2). The 4 reported postgraduate capstone units are contained within a Master of Fine Arts (Film and Television) (3) and a Master of Media (1).

At undergraduate level, nine universities have one-semester capstone units in their undergraduate degrees, six have two-semester capstones and two have capstone projects that continue over three semesters. All postgraduate programs have one semester capstone units.

Reported cohort numbers vary from four students (lowest) to 107 students (highest).

### **Cultural diversity in the classroom**

When asked to comment on their knowledge of the cultural diversity of their students, respondents generally reported on the numbers of domestic versus international students across the two cohorts.

At undergraduate level, nine of the 14 respondents replied that their capstone unit cohort consisted mainly of domestic students, with two respondents suggesting that these were 'mainly white' or majority 'Anglo-Celtic or European background'. Three respondents replied that they had 10-30% international students in their undergraduate unit. Only two respondents explicitly reported their undergraduate cohort to be culturally diverse, with one respondent suggesting that this diversity was present in the domestic student cohort alongside their international peers.

At postgraduate level, two of the four respondents reported that their cohorts were made up of 85-90% international students. A third respondent noted a split of approximately 50/50 domestic and international students, while the fourth respondent noted that 'all students are Australian residents but come from various international backgrounds'. Within this fourth cohort, it was noted that one student was Indigenous.

Thus, we can observe considerably higher numbers of international students at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level.

## **Crewing of capstone projects**

When asked how capstone student projects are crewed, respondents detailed a range of processes.

At undergraduate level, two common trends are identifiable. Firstly, nine respondents reported that student crews are self-selected, or managed by student producers, as the following comment attests: ‘Students are currently left to crew their own projects amongst themselves. We leave them to do this, but constantly remind them (particularly if we do get an all-male crew) about the importance of diversity’. Secondly, six respondents reported that student crews were established based on a pitching or interview processes. For example, one respondent commented that ‘Students pitch for their first and second choice role at the beginning of the year. A crew role is then allocated in negotiation with staff. They fulfil this role over the year working in teams of 6 key creatives (heads of department)’.

At postgraduate level these trends also exist. For two of the four capstone units, it was noted that ‘Students pitch to industry at a crewing event hosted by the university. They also gather crews independently of this event’. In the case of the other two postgraduate units, respondents suggested that ‘student producers gather their own crews’ or crews are ‘self-formed’.

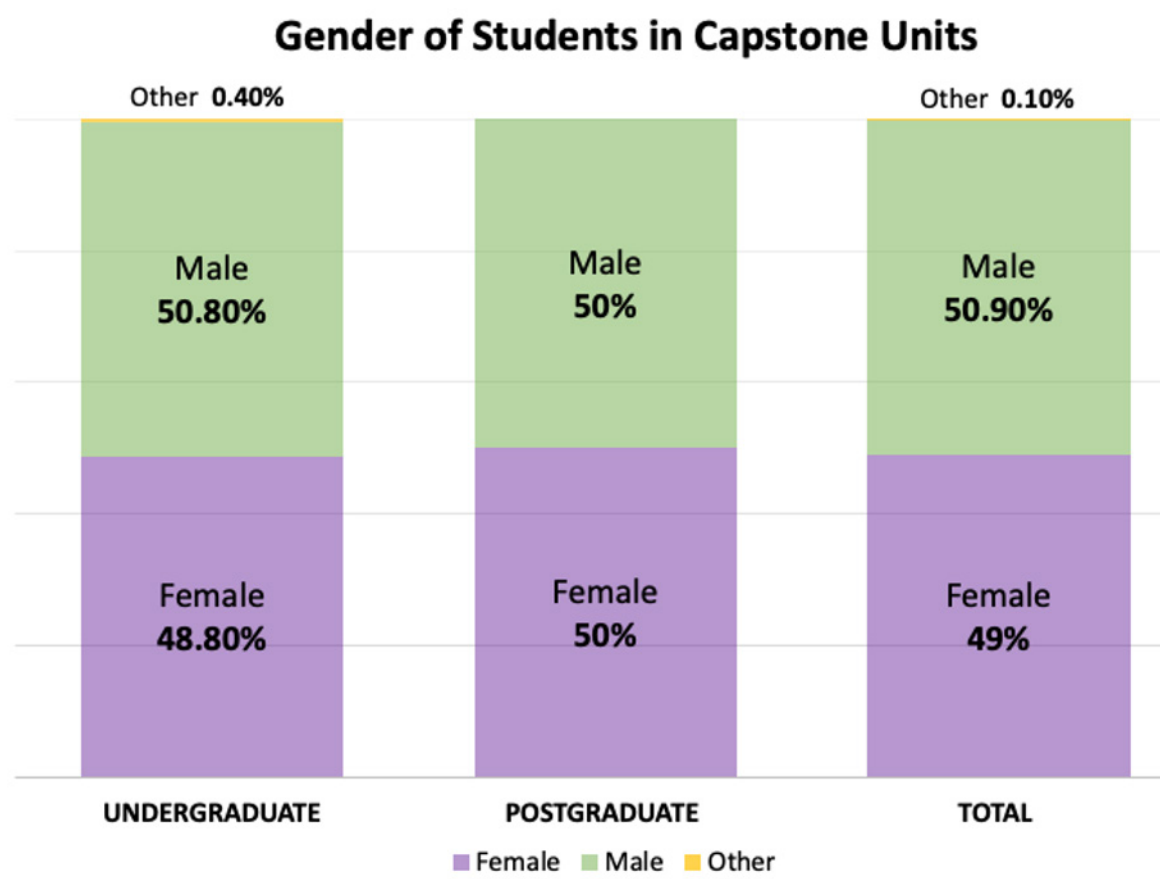
Across both undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts there were no examples given of direct intervention to ensure gender diversity in student production teams.

## KEY FINDINGS<sup>2</sup>

### 1. While close to even numbers of male and female students are completing capstone projects at film schools, crew roles are gendered

The ASPERA survey showed that numbers of male and female students completing capstone production courses is close to even. The aggregated data for undergraduate and postgraduate units reflected a cohort made up of 50.9% male, 49% female and 0.1% 'other' identifying students.

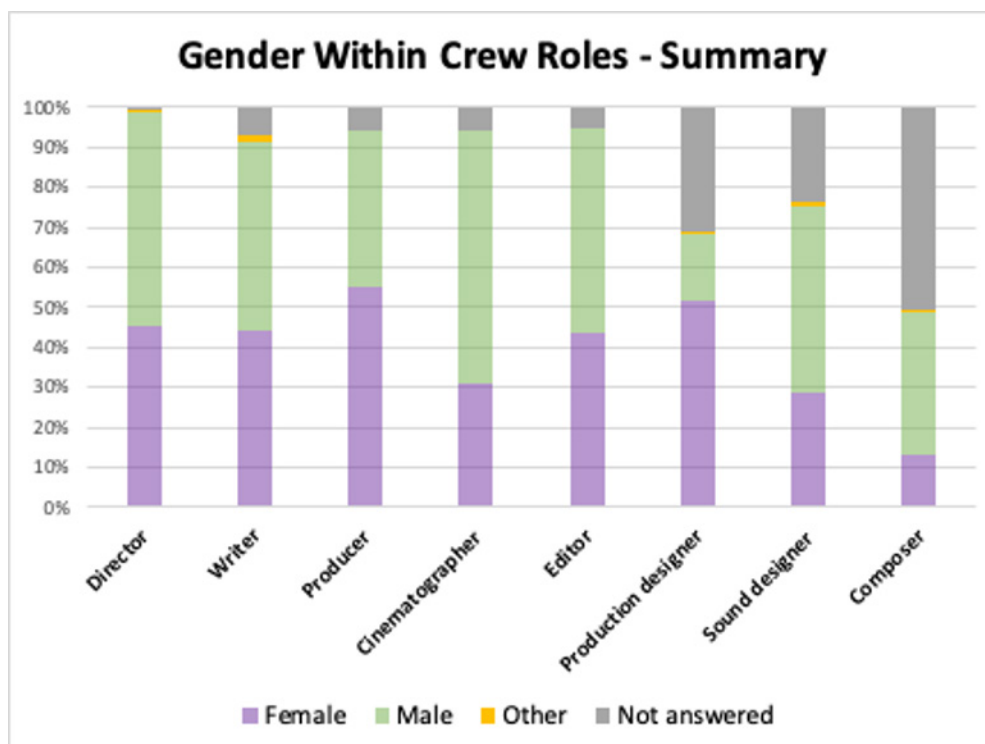
There is a similar gendered distribution of students at an undergraduate level, while postgraduate cohorts are split 50/50 between male and female students.



**By contrast** the breakdown of students by gender within crew roles **is uneven**. The skew is most pronounced in the roles of cinematographer and sound designer (male dominated) and producer and production designer (female dominated). Other roles, while less skewed, also show a higher percentage of males. These are presented below.

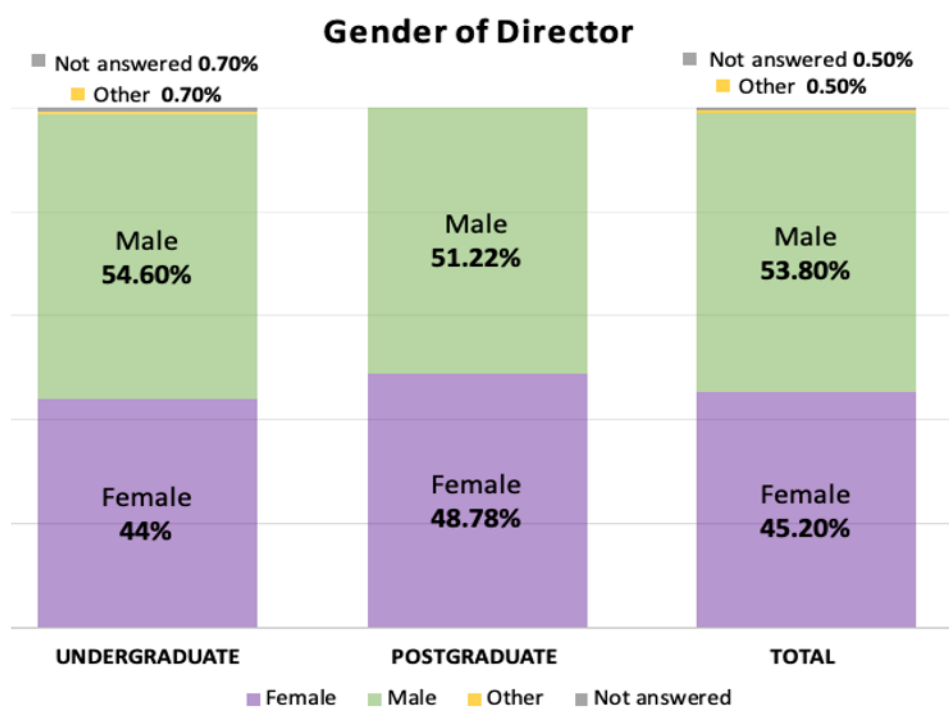
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<sup>2</sup> Please note that percentages displayed in the charts below may not add up to 100 due to individual number roundings.



### The director role

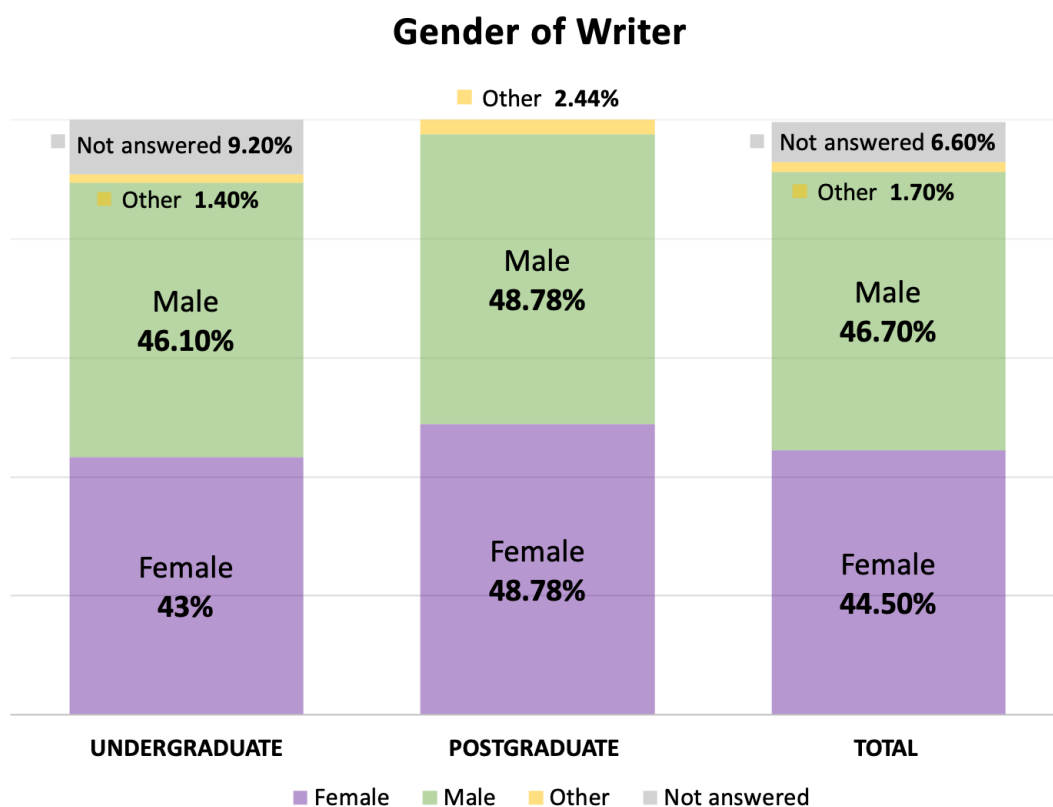
When undergraduate and postgraduate capstone projects are aggregated, a skew towards male students in the director role is revealed. Of the 182 projects, 98 have a male director (53.8%), 82 have a female director (45.2%), one director is identified as 'other' and one project's director is not specified. The table shows that there is significant difference for the director role between genders in undergraduate projects, while postgraduate projects have a more even gender divide.



## The writer role

When undergraduate and postgraduate capstone projects are aggregated, there is a small skew towards male students in the writer role. Of the 182 projects, 85 have a male writer (46.7%), 81 have a female writer (44.5%), three writers are identified as 'other' and the writers of 13 projects are not specified.

The figure presented below for undergraduate projects show a slightly more significant gendered difference, while postgraduate projects have even numbers.

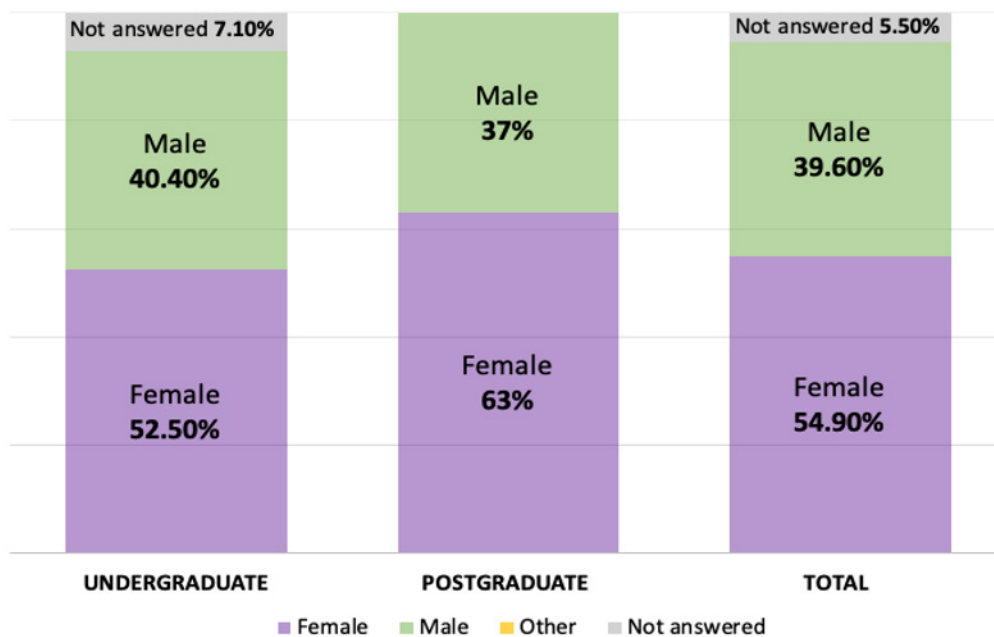


## The producer role

When undergraduate and postgraduate capstone project data is aggregated, there is an obvious skew towards female students in the producer role. Of the 182 projects, 100 have a female producer (54.9%), 72 have a male producer (39.6%), and five project producers (5.5%) are not specified. No students in this role are categorized as 'other'.

In the table below, the percentages show less difference between males and females in producer roles for undergraduate projects than postgraduate projects which have an even higher proportion of female students.

## Gender of Producer

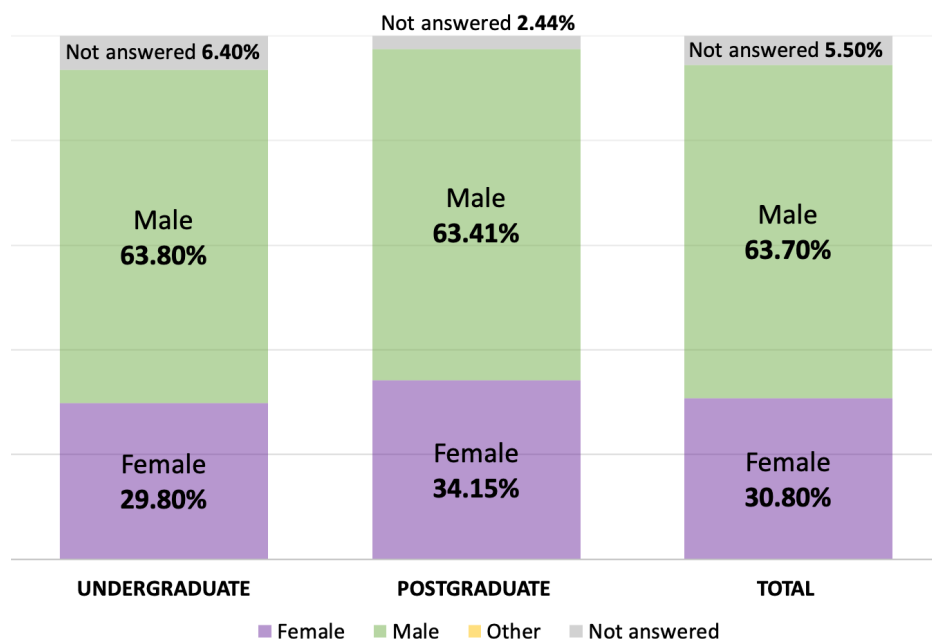


### The cinematographer role

Across the aggregated undergraduate and postgraduate capstone projects, there is a significant skew towards male students in the cinematographer role. Of the 182 projects, 116 have a male cinematographer (63.7%), 56 have a female cinematographer (30.8%), and ten project cinematographers (5.46%) are not specified. No students in this role are categorized as 'other'.

Looking at the table below, one can note that the percentages for undergraduate projects show a slightly higher skew towards male cinematographers. The majority of the projects for which the cinematographer's gender has not been specified are at undergraduate level (9 out of 10).

## Gender of Cinematographer



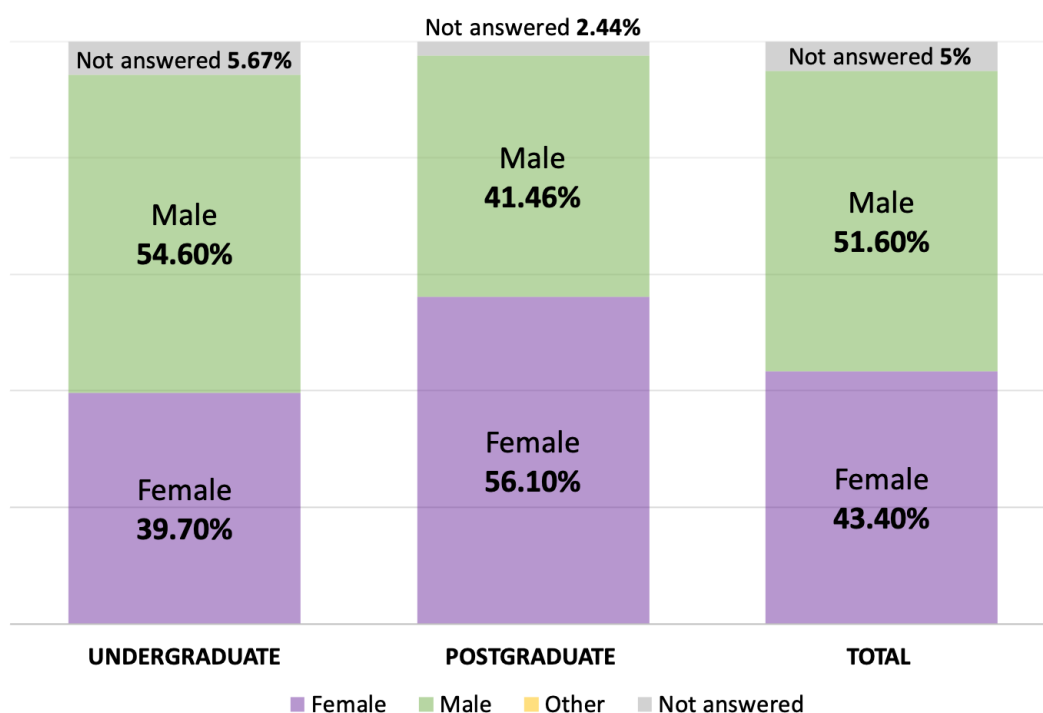


### The editor role

The aggregated data from undergraduate and postgraduate capstone projects reveals a skew towards male students in the editor role. Of the 182 projects, 94 have a male editor (51.6%), 79 have a female editor (43.4%), and nine project editors not specified. No students in this role are categorized as 'other'.

In the table below, the percentages for undergraduate projects show a significant skew towards male students in the editor role. This contrasts with postgraduate projects which have a higher proportion of female editors. Of the 41 postgraduate capstone projects, 23 have a female editor (56.10%), 17 projects have a male editor (41.46%), and one project's editor is not specified.

### Gender of Editor

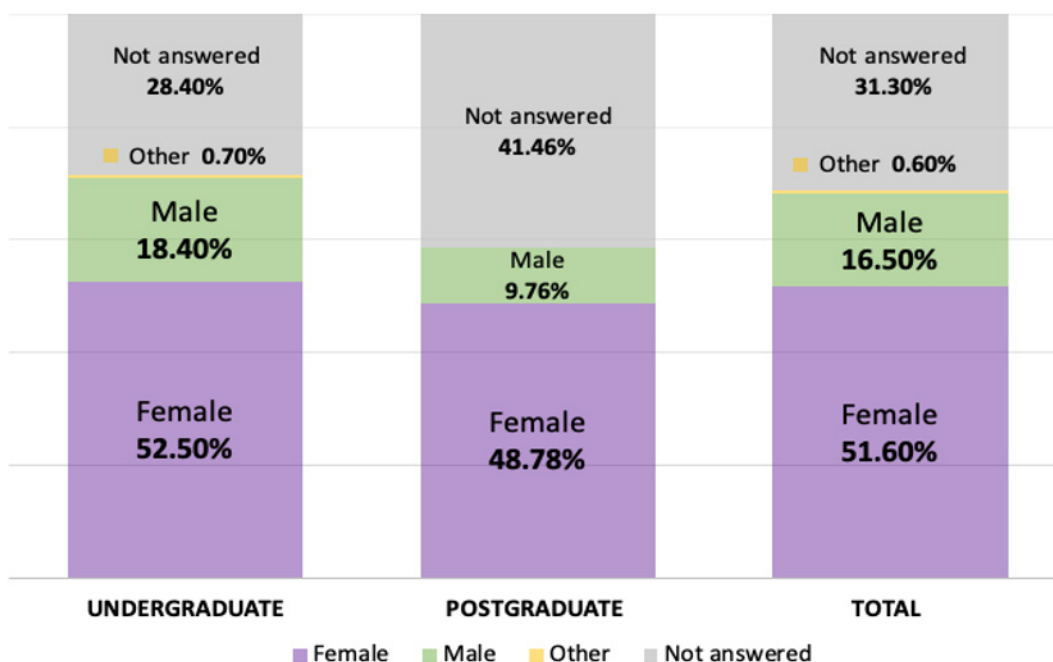


### The production designer role

When undergraduate and postgraduate capstone projects are aggregated, there is a skew towards female students in the production designer role. Of the 182 projects, 94 have a female designer (51.6%), 30 have a male designer (16.5%), one designer is identified as 'other' and 57 project designers (31.3%) are not specified.

The table below show that the figures for postgraduate projects reveal an even lower percentage of males in the production designer role.

## Gender of Production Designer

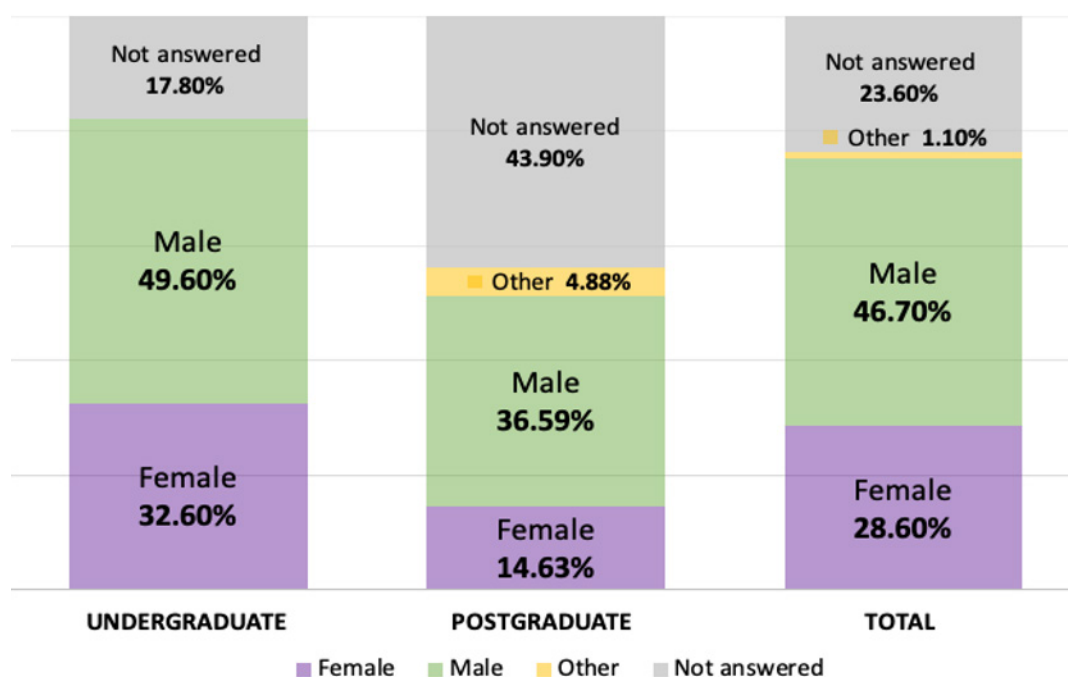


### The sound designer role

Aggregated data from undergraduate and postgraduate capstone projects (combined) shows a skew towards male students in the sound designer role. Of the 182 projects, 85 have a male sound designer (46.7%), 52 have a female sound designer (28.6%), two sound designers are identified as 'other' (1.1%) and 43 project sound designers (23.6%) are not specified.

The table below shows that the figures for postgraduate projects reveal an even lower percentage of females in the sound designer role.

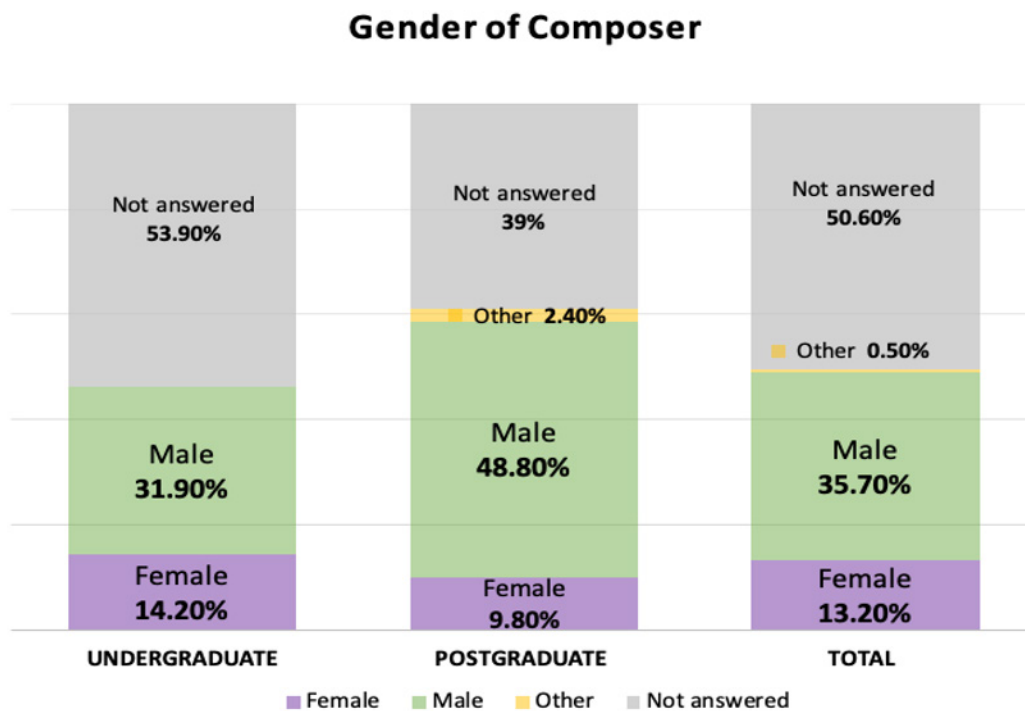
## Gender of Sound Designer



## The composer role

Aggregated data from undergraduate and postgraduate capstone projects shows a skew towards male students in the composer role. Of the 182 projects, 65 have a male composer (35.7%), 24 have a female composer (13.2%), one composer is identified as 'other' and 92 project composers (50.6%) are not specified.

The table below show that the figures for postgraduate projects reveal an even lower percentage of females in the composer role.



Overall, we note that high percentages of students occupying the production designer, sound designer and composer roles are not specified by instructors as identifying as a particular gender. While it is impossible to be conclusive as to the reasons behind this, two possibilities are that some projects did not have anyone fulfil these roles, or that the person fulfilling the role was not specified in the project credits.

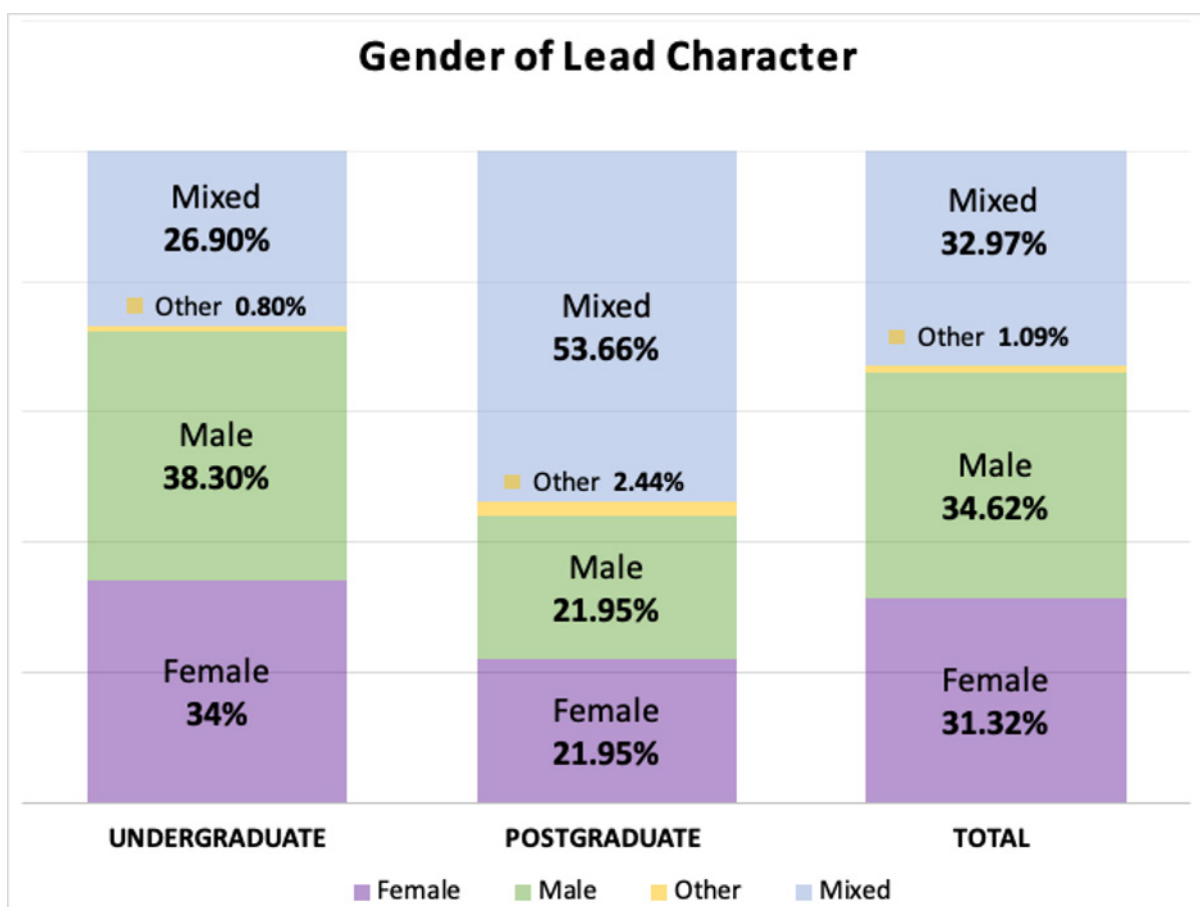
## 2. Diversity on screen in capstone projects is limited

While there is an even split of male and female lead characters that appear in capstone student projects, the diversity of characters is low or minimal in the other categories surveyed. Notably, there are higher levels of cultural diversity evident in postgraduate projects than in undergraduate projects. This may reflect the higher percentage of international students in the postgraduate cohort.

### Gender of lead character(s)

Of the 182 total projects, 63 feature lead characters that are male (34.62%), 57 feature lead characters that are female (31.32%), two feature lead characters identified as 'other' (1.09%), and 60 feature a mixture of both male and female characters as leads (32.97%).

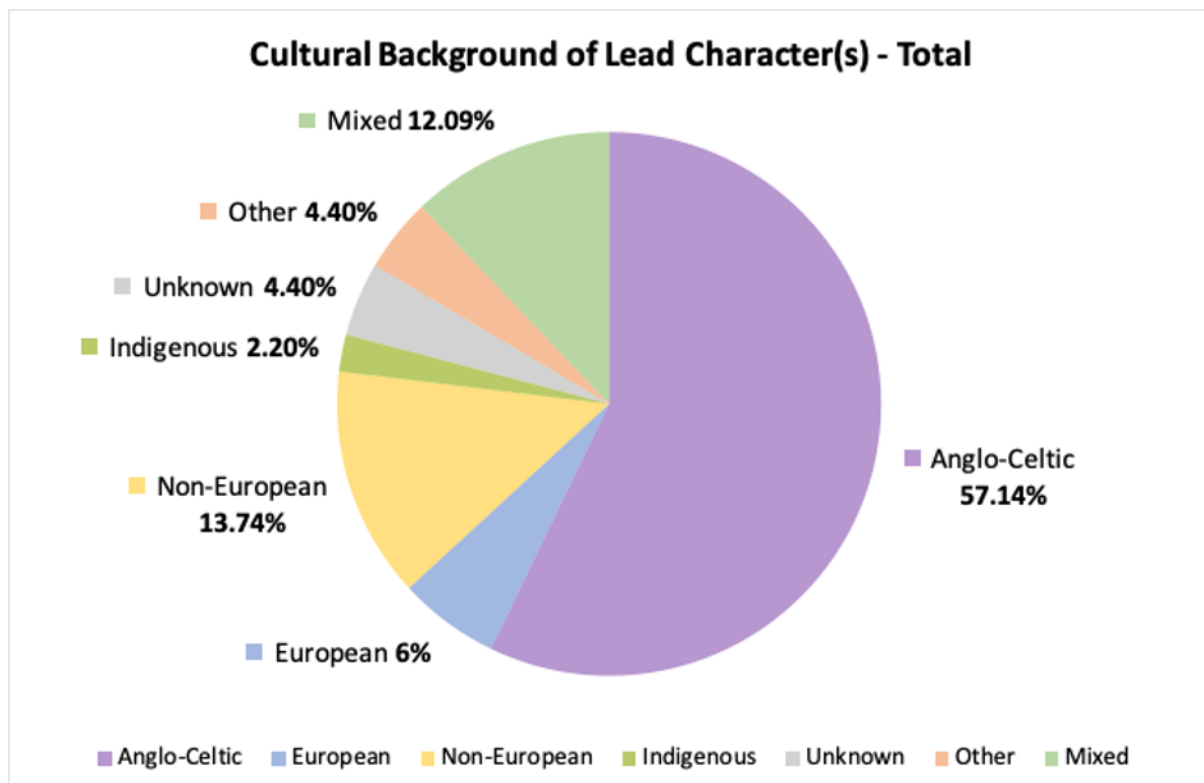
The table below reveal that the skew towards male only lead character/s is more pronounced at undergraduate level (38.3%) while the numbers of male and female lead characters is even at postgraduate level (21.95%). The majority of postgraduate capstone projects feature a mixture of male and female leads (53.66%).



### Cultural background of lead character(s)

The categories for this survey question are based on those used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Screen Australia. For a definition of each category, see survey question 27 in appendix 1.

Of the 182 total projects, 104 feature lead characters that are Anglo-Celtic (57.14%), 11 feature lead characters that are European (6%), 25 feature lead characters identified as Non-European (13.74%), four feature lead characters identified as Indigenous (Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) (2.2%), eight feature lead characters identified as 'unknown' (4.4%), eight feature lead characters identified as 'other' (4.4%), and 22 feature lead characters of a mixed cultural background (12.09%).



The table below shows that at undergraduate level, a slightly higher percentage of lead characters are Anglo-Celtic (58.7%) than in the aggregated total.

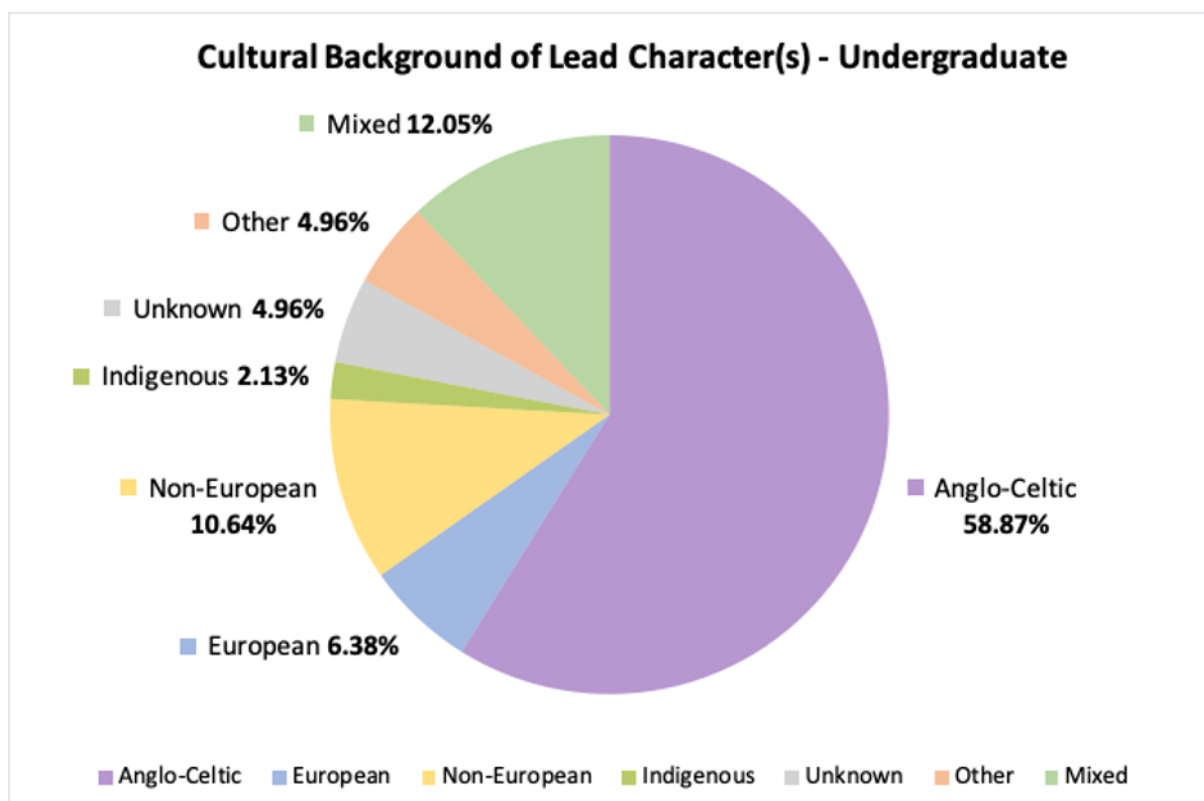
Further detail of characters listed as 'other' at undergraduate level includes the following descriptors:

- no lead characters;
- no people in the project;
- African-Australians;
- Japanese;
- African.

We note that according to the descriptors for various categories, people of African or Japanese descent should be included in the 'Non-European category'; therefore, this category percentage should be slightly higher than that listed.

Further detail of characters listed in the 'mixed' category at undergraduate level and includes the following responses supplied by survey respondents:

- 2 x Anglo and 1 x non-European;
- diverse;
- 1 Anglo, 1 non-European [Indian];
- Australian Aboriginal and Ethnic characters, European and non-European;
- mixture of Anglo-Celtic, European and Non-European;
- dozens of children of different cultural backgrounds are shown in each of three videos;
- both Anglo and Asian;
- Indigenous and European;
- Anglo-Celtic, Polynesian, French;
- Anglo-Celtic, Indian;
- Anglo Celtic and non-European;
- Anglo-Celtic, Asian;
- Anglo and European;
- various.



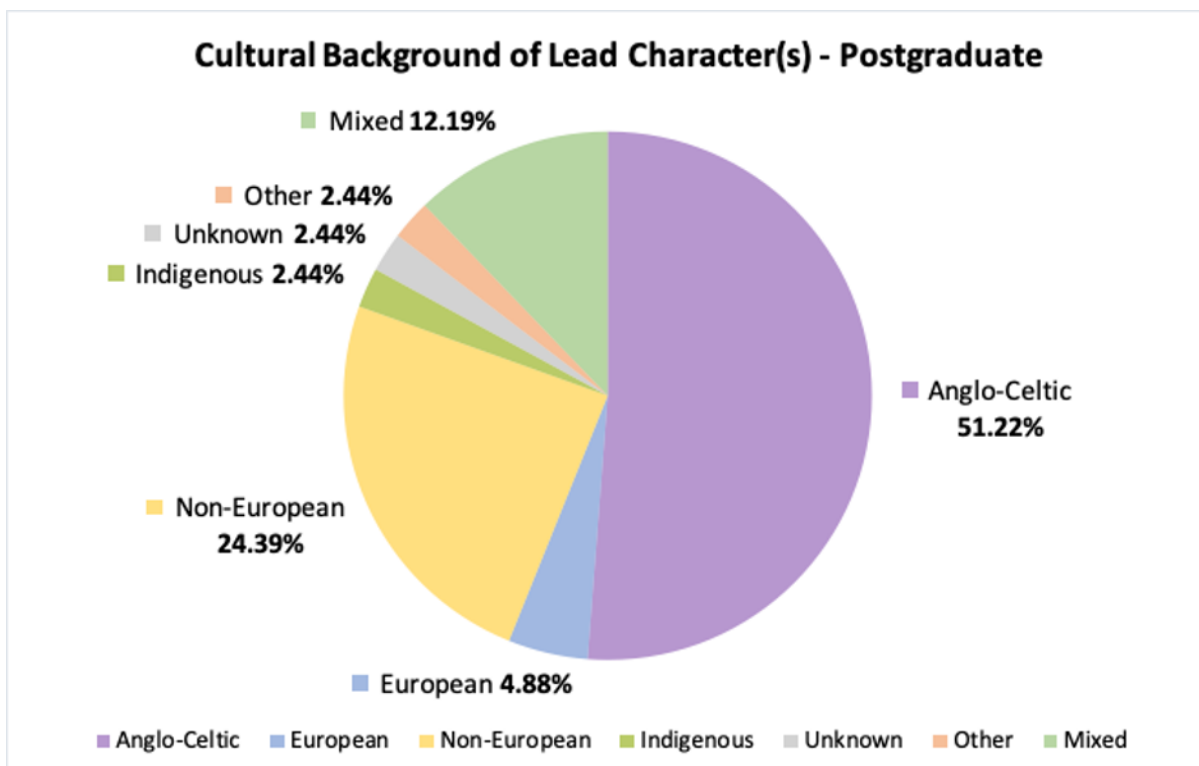
While Anglo-Celtic lead characters continue to dominate at postgraduate level (51.22%), a significantly higher percentage of Non-European characters can be observed in these projects (24.39%).

Further detail of characters listed as ‘other’ at postgraduate level includes South American, and Anglo-Chinese. Again, characters of these backgrounds should be included in the ‘Non-European’ category, meaning there is a higher actual proportion in this category when Other and Non-European are added together.

Further detail of characters listed in the ‘mixed’ category at postgraduate level includes the following responses supplied by survey respondents:

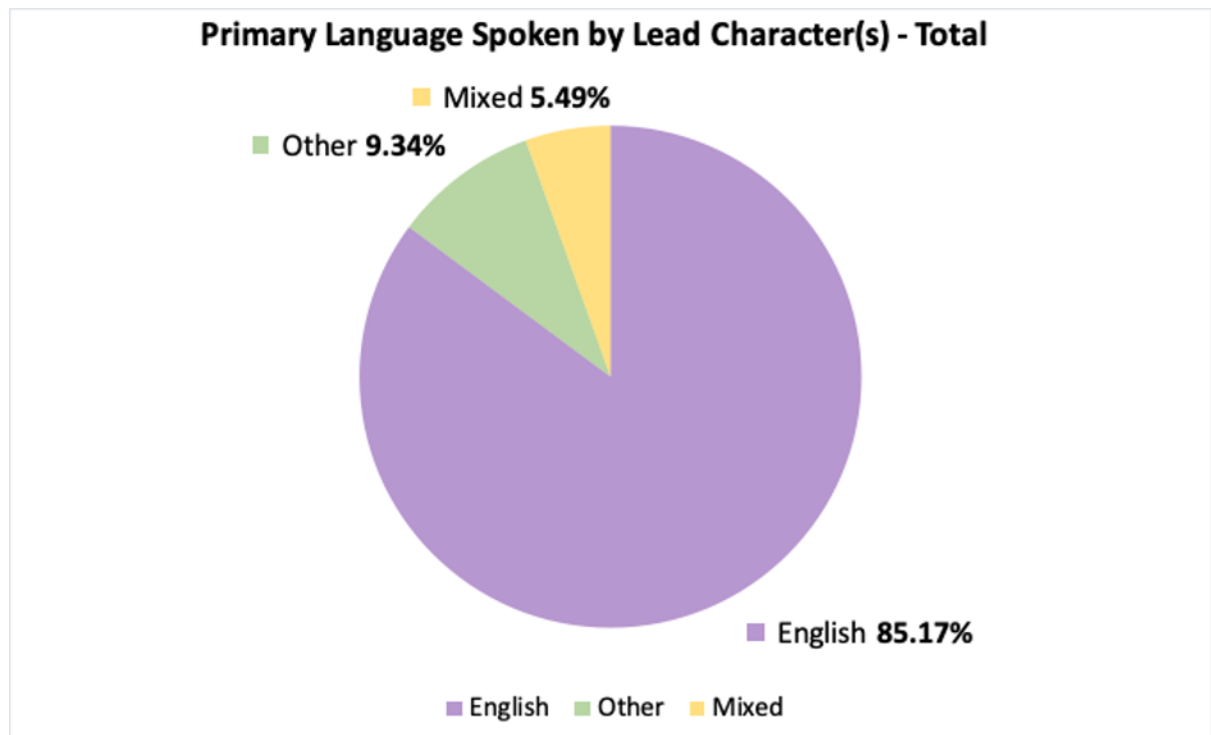
- Anglo/Asia;
- Chinese Anglo;
- Australian Aboriginal and Anglo.

In this instance, ‘Mixed’ refers to characters who have both an Anglo-Celtic and non-European or Indigenous ancestry.



### Primary language spoken by lead character(s)

Of the 182 total projects, 155 feature lead characters that speak English (85.17%), 17 feature characters that speak a language other than English (9.34%), and 10 feature characters that speak a mixture of languages (5.49%).



The table below shows that at undergraduate level, the percentage of characters that speak English is slightly higher than the overall percentage (90.78%), while the number of characters speaking a mixture of languages drops to 4.26%. The 'other' and 'mixed' languages are expanded below.

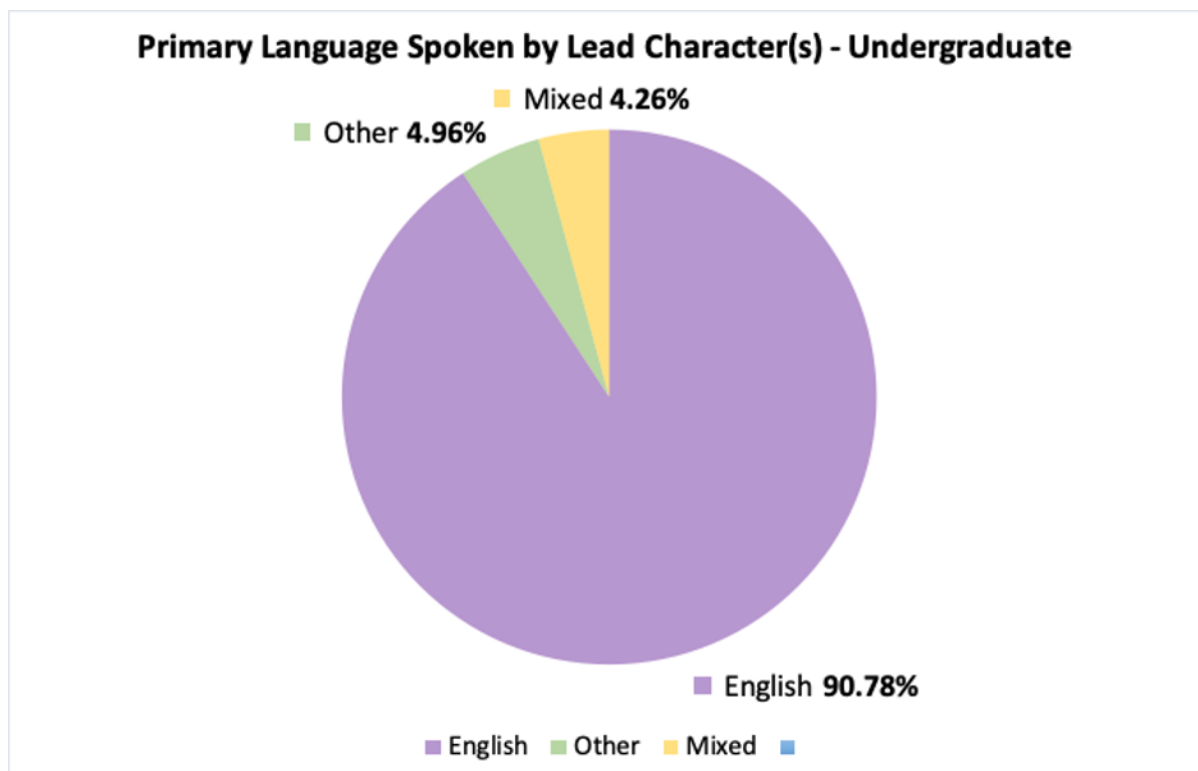
Further detail of languages listed as 'other' at undergraduate level includes the following:

Japanese, German, Chinese with English subtitles, Punjabi. Two projects are noted as having no dialogue.

Further detail of languages listed as 'mixed' at undergraduate level includes the following:

- Bantu;
- Swahili & English;
- Mixed Mandarin and English;
- English and Mandarin (2 capstone films);
- Interviews in English, Lyrics in Senegalese.





At postgraduate level, the percentage of characters that speak English drops to 65.85%, while the number of characters speaking a language other than English rises to 24.39%.

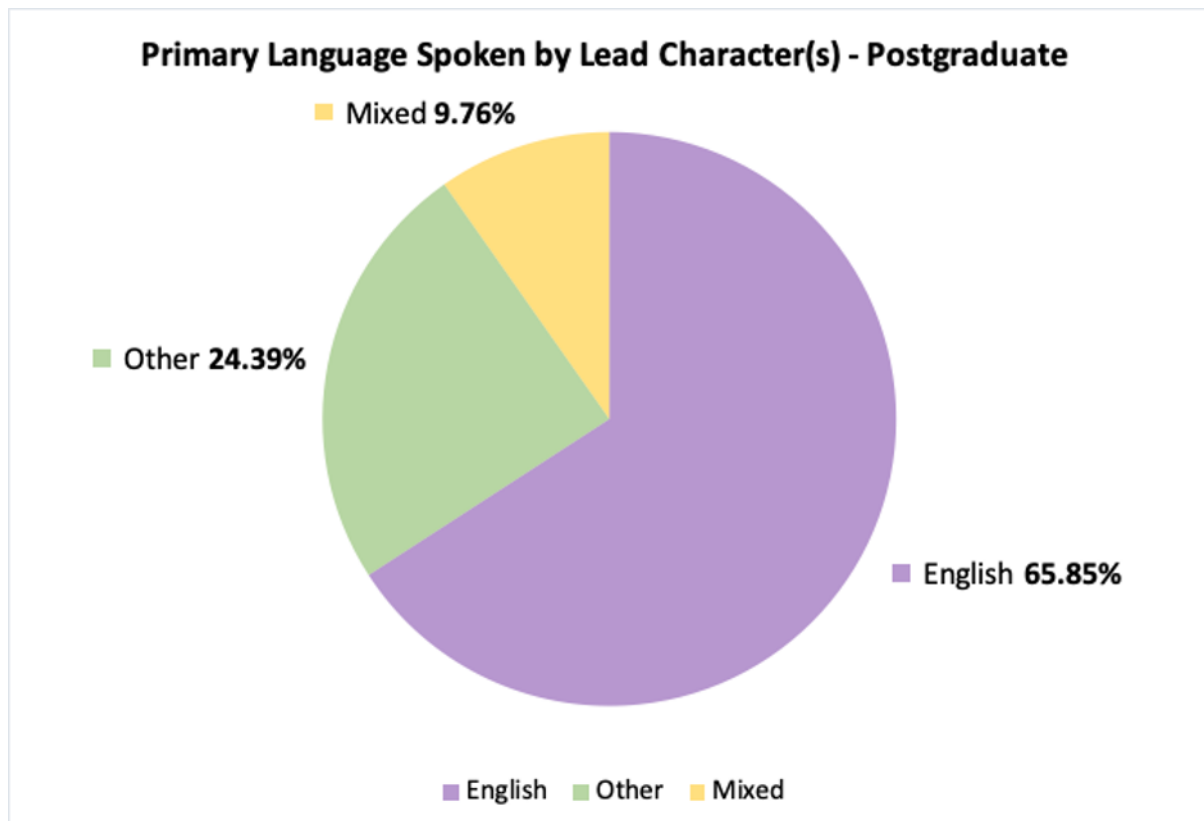
Further detail of languages listed as ‘other’ at postgraduate level includes the following:

- Laotian;
- Mandarin (3 capstone films);
- Ukrainian;
- Spanish.

Four respondents noted that the capstone project has no dialogue as it is either a silent film or music video.

Further detail of languages listed as ‘mixed’ at postgraduate level includes the following:

- English and Mandarin;
- English and Indian;
- English and Spanish.

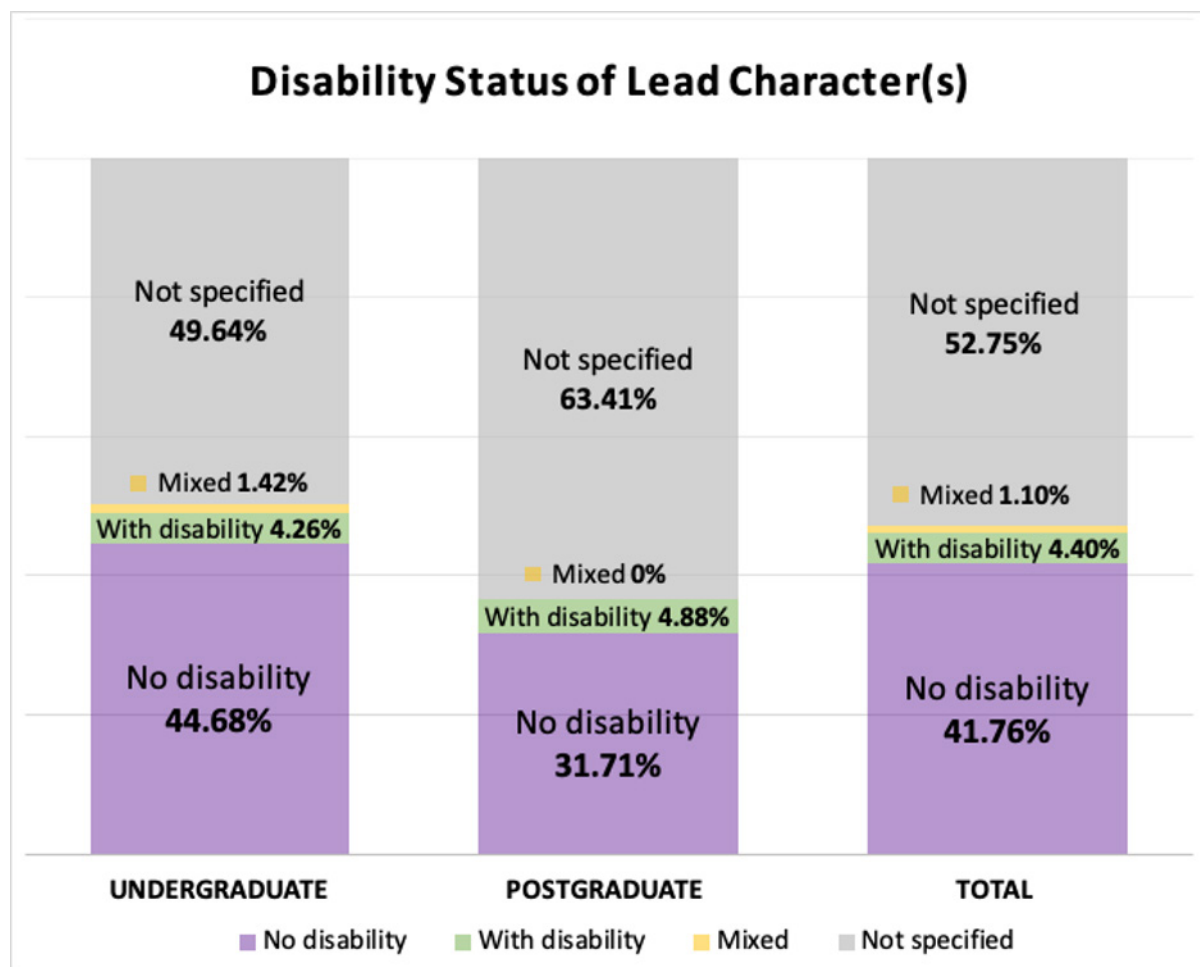


#### **Disability status of the lead character(s)**

Of the 182 total projects, respondents reported that eight feature lead characters with a disability (4.4%), 76 feature lead characters that without a disability (41.76%), 96 feature lead characters where a situation of disability is not specified (52.75%), and 2 feature lead characters that are of a mixed status- with and without disability (1.1%). Thus, the total percentage of disability on screen for lead characters is 5.5% (with disability and mixed).

The table below reveal that at undergraduate level, the percentage breakdown follows a similar pattern to the aggregated total. In the mixed category, respondents noted characters suffering from terminal illnesses and mental illness.

At postgraduate level, one can note a slightly higher percentage of lead characters identified as having a disability (4.88%), however no lead characters are identified as 'mixed' in the case of multiple leads within a single project. Also notable at postgraduate level is that the number of lead characters identified as not having a disability is lower (31.71%), and respondents have answered 'not specified' in higher numbers (63.41%).

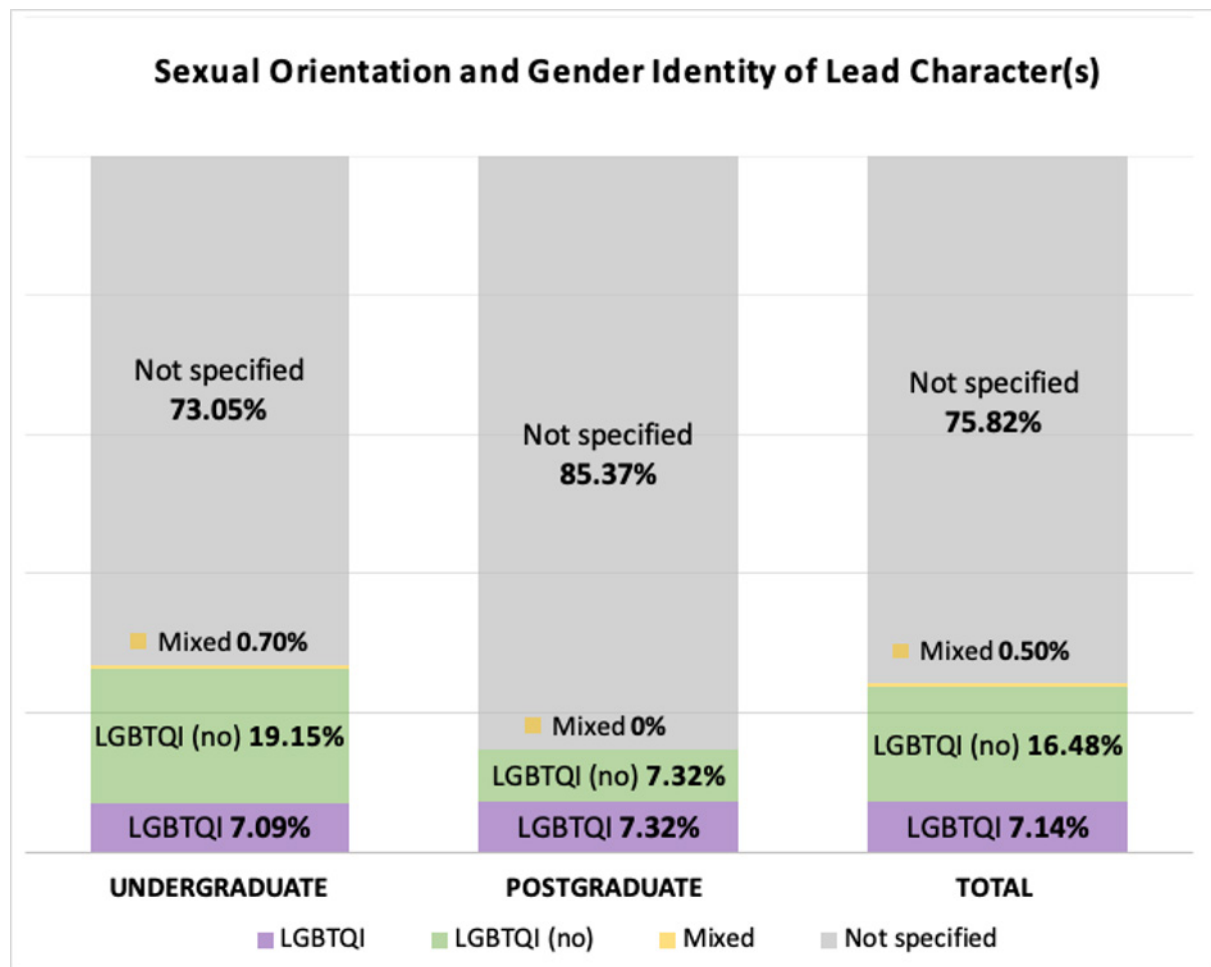


### Sexual orientation and gender identity of the lead character(s)

Of the 182 total projects, respondents reported that 13 feature lead characters that identified as LGBTQI (7.14%), 30 feature lead characters that did not identify as LGBTQI (16.48%), and one features lead characters with a mix of sexual orientation and gender identity (0.5%). In 138 of the projects (75.82%), respondents reported that the sexual orientation and gender identity of the lead character(s) was not specified. Thus, the total percentage of projects where a character that explicitly identifies as LGBTQI appears on screen is 7.64%.

The tables below reveal that at undergraduate level, the percentage breakdown follows a similar pattern to the overall total.

At postgraduate level, a similar percentage of lead characters are identified as LGBTQI (7.32%), however no lead characters are described as 'mixed' in the case of multiple leads within a single project. Also notable at postgraduate level is that the number of lead characters identified as not LGBTQI is lower than the overall total (7.32%), and respondents have answered 'not specified' in higher numbers (85.37%).



## Qualitative Findings

Many of the responses for the qualitative questions were quite diverse and so are difficult to group into clearly divided answers. Any patterns or majorities have been identified where possible.

### Explicitly addressing diversity in the curriculum

When asked whether students are exposed to subjects/units/capstones in which diversity issues are addressed explicitly, every respondent answered 'Yes'.

At undergraduate level, four respondents replied that students undertook theoretical units looking at screen representation where diversity was addressed. Four respondents noted the inclusion of units that addressed diversity through modules on group work, ethics and/or professional practice. Four respondents described how they addressed diversity within the capstone unit/s themselves, such as through guest lectures or by discussion. For example, one respondent stated that 'we discuss the importance of diversity in the capstone and discuss [statistics] around production roles'. Three respondents noted that while diversity was addressed in units/subjects outside of the capstone, these were not mandatory.

At postgraduate level, three respondents noted the inclusion of guest lectures and workshops to address codes of conduct and cultural sensitivity, while one respondent noted that diversity was addressed before students began the capstone unit/s.

### **The influence of cultural movements**

When asked about the motivating factors for the introduction of curriculum content that addresses diversity and inclusion, the majority of respondents answered that there was a move across the university and across the industry to discuss and increase inclusion and diversity, and that this had led to changes within units/courses.

When asked whether current cultural movements such as #metoo, #OscarsSoWhite, and Gender Matters etc have influenced student production processes, the responses were mixed: however, the majority of respondents at both undergraduate and postgraduate level believed that these movements **had** influenced student production processes. Comments included:

*'I believe that students are more conscious of being in all male or all female teams than they may previously have been. All male teams are seen as needing scrutiny.'*

*'The students are aware of these cultural movements and the general zeitgeist and it is reflected in both their attitude and the content of their works.'*

*'Students seem much more willing to report unacceptable behaviour - if not specifics then certainly the scale of the general problem.'*

A smaller number of respondents were unsure or did not agree that the above-mentioned cultural movements had influenced student production processes.

### **Suggestions for curriculum content and teaching approaches to address diversity**

When asked for feedback or suggestions on how issues of gender and diversity could be addressed in the curriculum, respondents at undergraduate and postgraduate level mainly answered in three ways. Quotes from respondents are included below the dot points as illustrative examples.

- **Ensure discussion to ensure students are aware of their own prejudices**

*'Ensuring that students are aware of their own built in prejudices is a good start.'*

- **Overt curriculum design that covers these topics**

*'Discuss stats around gender and production roles. Show a broad range of examples and readings. Promote diversity by making it part of the content they engage with in class.'*

- **Include diverse texts**

*‘With our new curriculum we’ve put it front and centre that our students need to be exposed to a range of work created by people from all sorts of different backgrounds with the hope that they can be influenced and channel that into their own practice.’*

One respondent stressed the importance of ‘role modelling tutors, technical staff and demonstrators who are females, who are competent with film equipment and post-production software’. Another respondent suggested that their institution was ‘close to implementing Screen Australia’s guidelines around diverse creative and production teams. So an element of getting a green light would be based on the diversity of the team and their contribution to the cultural landscape’.

When asked for feedback or suggestions on **how issues of gender and diversity could be addressed in student production processes or teaching approaches**, respondents at undergraduate and postgraduate level mainly answered three ways:

- **Ensure that students are aware of their own and others’ prejudices**

*‘We have students take the Bechdel Test, the DuVernay Test, etc, to see if they would pass muster. Sometimes the students, who believe they are woke and with it, realise their own productions could have more diversity. We also have a reflective assessment element to the capstone production units design, which encourages students to understand their own biases and helps students to identify areas for improvement.’*

- **Direct intervention in class by teachers**

*‘There are so many things that can be done: quotas, rubrics that award grades for students enacting these ideas themselves, encouraging research projects around these issues, explorations of representation vs perspective, ETHICS embedded in curriculum/coursework/projects etc.’*

*‘Ask students to nominate their gender identification and preferred pronoun at initial introductions. Open up discussion of student’s experience, in general terms, of gender in group dynamics, in team meetings, team communications and on-set. Create diverse teams by transparently composing teams that are diverse according to a process such as TBL (see <http://www.teambasedlearning.org>). At the same time, invite or allow students to form teams based on a specific attribute of difference.’*

- **Introduce individual formative assessments so that all students are able to get their hands on film equipment, to reduce the technical intimidation that can occur**

*‘(Introduce) formative assessments that are individual, so that females don’t have any opportunity to retreat behind others, be that male or female or neutral gendered.’*

One respondent suggested that ‘Gender sensitivity training might be an interesting inclusion to help students better understand the difficulties that different genders face.’ Another respondent commented that ‘we have found that script readings in class have been a great way to generate discussions around gender and diversity’. There was considerable crossover between the answers to this question and to the previous one.

## **WHAT NEXT?**

It is hoped that this data will lay the foundations for further research and the introduction of measures to address diversity at film schools, and in the Australian screen industries going forward.

Further research, and in particular, the surveying of students, may help to illuminate the reasons behind the trends evident above. Questions remain as to the reasons why certain genders gravitate towards particular crew roles, the perceptions that students have of these roles, and how early these mindsets are determined.

Further research into diversity on screen might determine whether the levels observed in 2019 capstone student productions are representative of diversity on screen in Australian screen industry outputs.

This report will be distributed to Screen Australia, state- and territory-based screen funding agencies, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) and other industry stakeholders. ASPERA hopes to open a dialogue between teachers, academics and industry stakeholders, perhaps involving a forum or workshops, that can positively affect perceptions and behaviours with regard to gender and diversity in the Australian screen industry and academy.

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## **Appendix 1: 'Diversity in the Screen Production Classroom' Survey Questions**

Q1- Do you consent to participate in the study? (Yes/No)

Q2- Name of University/Institution

Q3- Name of degree program for the capstone project

Q4- Name of subject/course/unit

Q5- Duration of subject/course/unit for the capstone project (one semester/two semesters/other-please specify)

Q6- Number of students in the subject/course/unit for the capstone project

Q7- Class size per subject/course/unit for the capstone project

Q8- Gender of students in class- provide numbers for female/male/other/not specified

Q9- Do you have any comments on the cultural diversity of the student cohort?

Q10- How are the student productions crewed?

Q11- How are issues of gender distribution of crew addressed and/or resolved in student production teams?

Q12- Are the students exposed to subjects/units/courses in which diversity issues are addressed explicitly?

Q13- If applicable, what have been the motivating factors for the introduction of curriculum content that addresses diversity and inclusion?

Q14- Do you think current cultural movements such as, #MeToo, #OscarsSoWhite, Gender Matters etc have influenced student production processes? If so, tell us how.

Q15- Do you have any feedback or suggestions on how issues of gender and diversity could be addressed in the curriculum?

Q16- Do you have any feedback or suggestions on how issues of gender and diversity could be addressed in student production processes and/or teaching approaches?

### **CAPSTONE PRODUCTIONS**

Q17- PRODUCTION 1: ADD TITLE + Production type (E.g. Fiction/Documentary/Other) Please note that a survey page for each production needs to be filled in individually. Please also note that all data collected will be de-identified.

Q18- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Director (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q19- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Writer (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q20- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Producer (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q21- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Cinematographer (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q22- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Editor (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q23- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Production Designer (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q24- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Sound Design (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q25- Gender of Key Creative Crew- Composer (Male/Female/Other/Not applicable)

Q26- Gender of the lead character(s) (Male/Female/Other/Mixture- in the case of multiple leads)

Q27- Cultural background of the lead character(s)

Options:

**Anglo-Celtic:** Those of Anglo-Celtic heritage, based on country of birth of the person and both of their parents, where this is known; otherwise based on specified criteria. For example, people of English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh heritage from Australia, the UK, Ireland, North America, New Zealand or South Africa.

**European:** Those with a background from non-English-speaking European countries, based on country of birth of the person or at least one of their parents, where this is known; otherwise based on specified criteria. For example, people of French, Greek, Italian, Swedish heritage.

**Non-European:** Those with a background from countries outside Europe, excluding those of Anglo-Celtic background from the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia; based on country of birth of the person or at least one of their parents, where this is known; otherwise based on specified criteria. For example, people of Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern heritage.

**Indigenous:** Any Australians who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

**Unknown**

**Other:** please specify

**Mixed:** please provide details in the case of multiple lead characters with different cultural backgrounds

Q28- Primary spoken language of the lead character(s) (English only/ Other-please specify/ Mixed- please provide details in the case of multiple leads)

Q29- Disability status of the lead character(s) (With disability/ No disability/ Not specified/ Mixed- please provide details in the case of multiple leads)

Q30- Sexual orientation and gender identity of the lead character(s) (LGBTQI- Yes/ LGBTQI- No/ Not specified/ Mixed- please provide details in the case of multiple leads)

Q31- Do you wish to add details of another capstone production? (click YES until details of all capstone productions for the unit of study have been entered)

