

THE ILLUSTRATOR'S SURVEY



Hello my illustrating friends! Here we are again with a run down of another year's results from The Illustrators' Survey!

The Illustrators' Survey 2019/2020 was bigger and better than ever with a committee of incredible, diverse illustrators curating the questions and with support from Adobe, Cass Art, The AOI and Survey Monkey!

Together we have analysed, finalised and been very wise with the results, all presented here with notes from myself and the committee of illustrators.

Take the results however you want, share them, discuss them and keep them in mind as you move forward with your illustration career, but do always remember that this is a cross-section of a wonderful and very broad industry, there is no one-way of building your illustration practice.

Let's go!

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CASS **ART**
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A
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Q1. We're off to a phenomenal start here, I'm sorry for the 3% but to know that 97% of us are proud to be an illustrator is super news and a good solid reason why we all need to resolve any issues we find in this survey, to give us the industry we want to be working in, but also to bring more people into the profession and enable them to be proud illustrators too.

Q2. The 66% feeling supported is also good, but not great. The support is often there, but clear advice and resources are not always as accessible to everyone as they could be.



5. Open Question : What negative aspects would you like to see change in the illustration industry?

With an open question you never really know what you're going to get, thanks to Survey Monkey's Word Cloud analysis, the top words here were 'pay' and 'pricing'. Illustrators are feeling under-valued, and at the same time aren't sure what their worth is. It's been a hot topic for the passed year, and we're obviously still not succeeding with this. In some areas budgets are extremely low (so low that we should all be saying no to them) and the process of working out a fee is still a cloudy one for a lot of unrepresented illustrators.

A lot of illustrators are also struggling to break through and make a name for themselves, especially outside of Europe and the US where the platforms to be seen just aren't there. There are requests for more established artists to help others up the ladder, although it's not clear how we can all make this happen. Illustrators the world over also commented on how a small number of illustrators appear to 'get all the work' while the majority go unnoticed.

Interestingly, the number of illustrators complaining about spec work and offers of exposure has dropped since last year, is our message starting to get through?

6. Open Question : What are the positives of working in the illustration industry?

There were two key responses to this, the most popular word being 'community', illustrators are finding support from their fellow illustrators, and happily communicating (predominantly online) across borders and becoming friends, colleagues and comrades. Many commented that you could always get advice, knowledge and support from peers where industry bodies aren't accessible.

The second dominant positive was the creative freedom of working for yourself and managing your own career independently, a proportion of illustrators enjoy running their businesses, marketing themselves and reaping the rewards. Illustrators are enjoying finding new ways to work, moving into animation or gaming to grow as a creative professional. Illustrators seem especially keen on choosing their own hours and workplaces, including working while travelling.

Work

7.

How long have you been working in the illustration industry?

1-2 years 26%	3-5 years 27%
–	–
5-10 years 23%	10-15 years 12%
–	–
15+ years 11.26%	

Q7. Simon Whittaker questioned why such a drop-off after 10 years in the profession? Is this something we all need to look at?

9.

Where are most of your clients based?

(selecting 2 answers)

UK 55%	North America 52%
–	–
Rest of Europe 24%	Asia 6%
–	–
Oceania 3%	South America 3%
–	–
Africa 2%	

8.

Where are you based?

UK 48%	North America 23%
–	–
Rest of Europe 18%	Asia 5%
–	–
South America 3%	Africa 2%
–	–
Oceania 2%	

Q8 & Q9. Dissecting these figures, most illustrators working outside Europe and North America are finding work from within their own regions, work which doesn't often get commissioned to artists outside of those regions. North America however is feeding work out to all corners of the globe. The ties between European illustrators and American clients are obviously very strong, but there is still scope to build relationships between these two continents and the rest of the world, especially in order to maximise the diversity of the illustration community,

10.

What was your illustration work situation in 2019?

- Full-time illustrator 39%
-
- Employed in both a creative job and working professionally in illustration 24%
-
- Employed in both a non-creative job and working professionally in illustration 18%
-
- Other 10%
-
- Student earning from illustration part-time 9%

Q10. These figures have been fairly stable around these numbers for 3 years of doing the survey now. It's good to see students testing the water and earning from their skills, but as ever the instability of being an illustrator is preventing people from focusing on it full-time, either splitting their time between another job or family. Interestingly, a notable number of the 'Other' respondents are spending their time between illustrating and writing professionally.

11.

How was your workload in 2019?

- Less than previous years 28%
-
- Same as previous years 22%
-
- More than previous years 50%

Q11. Again these figures are unchanged from previous years, which in general should mean growth (illustration is being used more than ever before, especially across corporate and tech businesses) but also seems to be reflecting the number of new illustrators joining the industry.

12.

Which sectors have most of your work been in in 2019?

(Selecting 3 answers)

Publishing	40%	Private commissions	40%
–	–	–	–
Editorial	34%	Art prints/exhibitions	31%
–	–	–	–
Advertising	26%	Products	16%
–	–	–	–
Animation/motion	15%	Packaging	10%
–	–	–	–
Live art / murals	9%	Textiles / apparel	7%
–	–	–	–
Console games	5%	App creation	3%
–	–	–	–
App creation (games)	3%		

Q12. In previous years respondents were asked to choose one sector only, however this year we opened up to include 3 sectors and it's fascinating to find out how many illustrators have added private commissions and art prints to their toolkit alongside the traditional publishing, editorial and advertising work.

App and game artwork commissions are still fairly low considering the growth of those industries, however this could be down to more illustration work being done in-house in the tech industry.



Self Promotion

13.

Which avenues brought in the most work in 2019?

(Selecting 3 answers)

Regular / repeat clients 51%	Instagram 46%	Referrals from clients/peers 43%
–	–	–
Personal website / SEO 30%	Twitter 24%	Other social media 15%
–	–	–
Illustration agents 15%	Cold calling emails 11%	Networking events 10%

Q13. As ever, it pays to be friendly, to keep clients coming back and get those referrals.

Interestingly, only 4% of us said they were paying for marketing in any way.

14.

Which social media platforms are most beneficial to your illustration career?

Instagram 84%	Twitter 53%	Instagram Stories 24%
–	–	–
Facebook 24%	Pinterest 9%	Tumblr 5%
–	–	–
YouTube 4%	Facebook Stories, WhatsApp, Slack, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Twitch, Flickr all under 3%	

15.

Are you confident using SM algorithms to your advantage?

Yes 20%
No 80%

Q15. We all appear to love Social Media, especially Instagram and Twitter, but the mysterious algorithm is causing an issue for most.

Survey Committee illustrator Katie Chappell perhaps gives the best advice...

*"IT DOESN'T MATTER. I don't think we need to worry about likes and traffic *that* much. Yes, it's important, but at the end of the day we are image makers and we needn't worry.*

Worry about your website and showing up consistently, not the social media algorithms."

16.

Do you actively aim to get featured on design blogs or magazines?

Yes 18%
No 82%

17.

Do you send out any of the following on a regular basis?

Direct emails to potential clients
49%
–
Social media ads or boosted posts
27%
–
Printed mailers
18%

Direct emails to previous clients
46%
–
Email newsletters
18%
–

18.

When seeking new potential clients, where do you source their contact details?

- Your own online research (company websites etc) 74%
-
- Social Media 58%
-
- LinkedIn 34%
-
- Asking other illustrators 29%
-
- Bought contact list / directory 12%

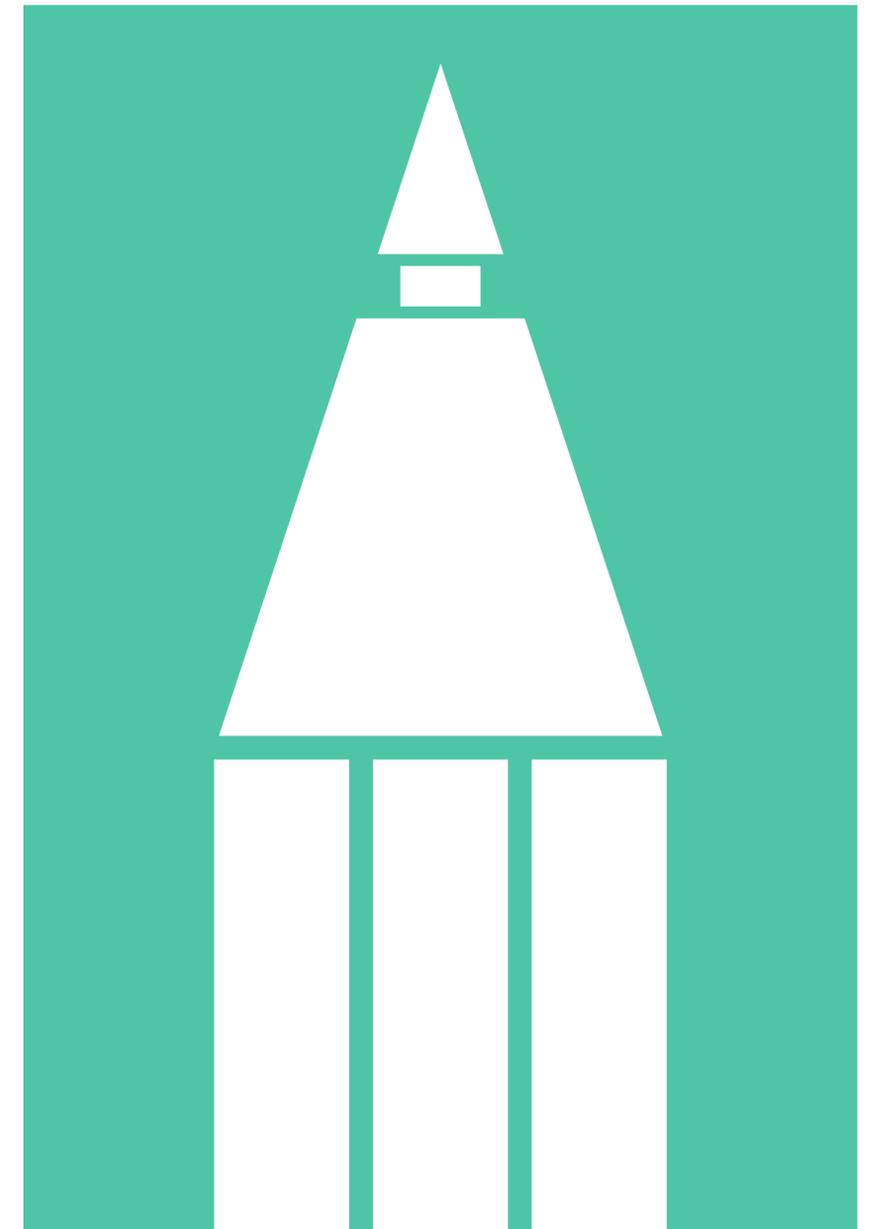
Q18. I'm really happy with this, illustrators need a strong, independent work ethic and this shows that they're out there finding their contacts themselves and not waiting for everything to fall into their laps and be handed to them in a guidebook.

Get out there, find your people and get some work.

19.

In an average month, how much time do you think you spend on self-promotion (including folio updates)

None 11%	Less than 1 day 23%
–	–
1 - 3 days 36%	3 - 5 days 15%
–	–
5 days+ 15%	



Money

20.

Are you confident giving initial estimates to clients?

Yes
45%
–
No
55%

21.

Are you confident negotiating with clients?

Yes
46%
–
No
54%

22.

When giving a price estimate to a client, how do you quantify the fee?

Image license only
12%
–
Image license plus time required
62%
–
Time required only
27%

23.

How often do you use a contract or Acceptance of Commission document?

Always
33%
–
Often
29%
–
Rarely
25%
–
Never
12%

24.

How often do you request a deposit / up-front payment?

Always
24%
–
Often
24%
–
Rarely
32%
–
Never
20%

25.

Do you discuss or contract a kill-fee when taking a commission?

Always
17%
–
Often
19%
–
Rarely
30%
–
Never
33%

26.

How many of your commissions were paid late in 2019?

More than half
19%

–

Half
14%

–

Less than half
38%

–

None
30%

27.

How often were you asked to pitch or work for free in 2019?

Often
32%

–

Rarely
44%

–

Never
24%

28.

Have you had a case (of any size) of copyright infringement involving your work in the past year?

Yes
22%

–

No
78%

*Money, money, money. *sighs* In general I'm afraid to say nothing has changed in 3 years, we're still not overly confident with money, BUT WE NEED TO BE. We're asking for deposits and kill-fees more than before but still not as standard and not often enough. Of course not every commission feels right to discuss these matters, especially private commissions or editorial with quick-turnaround times, but it is something we should all consider and discuss with our commissioners.*

Less than half of commissions are paid late, which is a positive (unchanged on previous years), but often those that are coming in overdue can be damaging to everything from cash-flow and day-to-day lifestyle to mental health and career sustainability.

Q28. This is an important statistic, not the percentage itself, but the fact that 253 of the illustrators who answered this question have had a case of copyright infringement in some way, the total number of cases will of course be far higher across the industry. It's rife, inconsiderate businesses and often so-called 'fellow' creatives are repurposing, copying and straight-thieving images, words and ideas for their own gain, and all too often they're getting away with it. Illustrators often aren't sure the best way to handle this situation and often can't afford the legal advice to chase the culprit.

29.

What price range are most of your individual commissions?

Under £500 (\$660 / €600)
55%

–

£1000 - £2500 (up to \$3330 / €3000)
11%

–

£5000+ (over \$6660 / €6000)
3%

£500 - £1000 (up to \$1330 / €1200)
26%

–

£2500 - £5000 (up to \$6660 / €6000)
5%

–

Q29. Of course a rise in private commissions means there may be more low-budget projects floating around, but across the board the committee and I are very disappointed to find out how many illustrators are working on such small commissions with fees that would never cover the time spent on it, let alone your skills and talents. Know your worth, seek bigger opportunities, you're worth more.

30.

Aside from commercial commissions, how else do you profit from illustration?

Other online store
47%

–

Patreon / Ko-Fi
11%

Etsy store
30%

–

Skillshare teaching
3%

Teaching
22%

–

YouTube
2%

31. Have you had financial support from family or a spouse in 2019?

Regular (family) 13%
–
Regular (spouse) 15%
–
Occasional (family) 10%
–
Occasional (spouse) 10%

32. The AOI would like full time illustrators to earn at the very least £20K annually. Are you?

Yes 40%
No 60%

Q32. There are a lot of variables at play here, part-time illustrators etc, but the key to it all is cross-referencing answers and discovering that 55% of full-time illustrators responding to the survey are NOT earning over £20,000 per year.

I wish we had a solution right here and now, there are so many factors involved, but this statistic needs to be higher, illustration is a viable skilled profession and changes are needed here.

Q33 & 34. I feel this is a result of illustrators working in new markets or with inexperienced commissioners. I'm very surprised by these figures, but the solution is to open the conversation between artist and commissioner and always be clear on the process.

33. Do you feel that most commissioners have an understanding of how pricing illustration works?

Yes 19%
No 81%

34. Do you feel that most commissioners have an understanding of how licensing works?

Yes 16%
No 84%

35. Do you find that most commissioners are clear when briefing a project?

Yes 66%
–
No 34%

Your Creative Work

36.

What are your top 3 sources of inspiration?

(Selecting 3 answers)

Other illustrator's work online 66%	Art/design books 41%	Real world discussions 27%
–	–	–
Nature 34%	Music 20%	Literature 19%
–	–	–
Graphic Novels 17%	Podcasts 16%	Galleries 16%
–	–	–
Travel abroad 16%	Creative talks/events 15%	Museums 15%
–	–	–
Gaming 12%	Local travel 10%	Blogs 6%
–	–	–
Architecture 6%	Mindfulness/Meditation 6%	Fitness 5%
–	–	–
Sport 3%	Religion 2%	

Q36. This is not a positive stat, at all. In order to grow as an illustrator you can't be borrowing from others in our field, you need to find something new, inside you or outside of the illustration world.

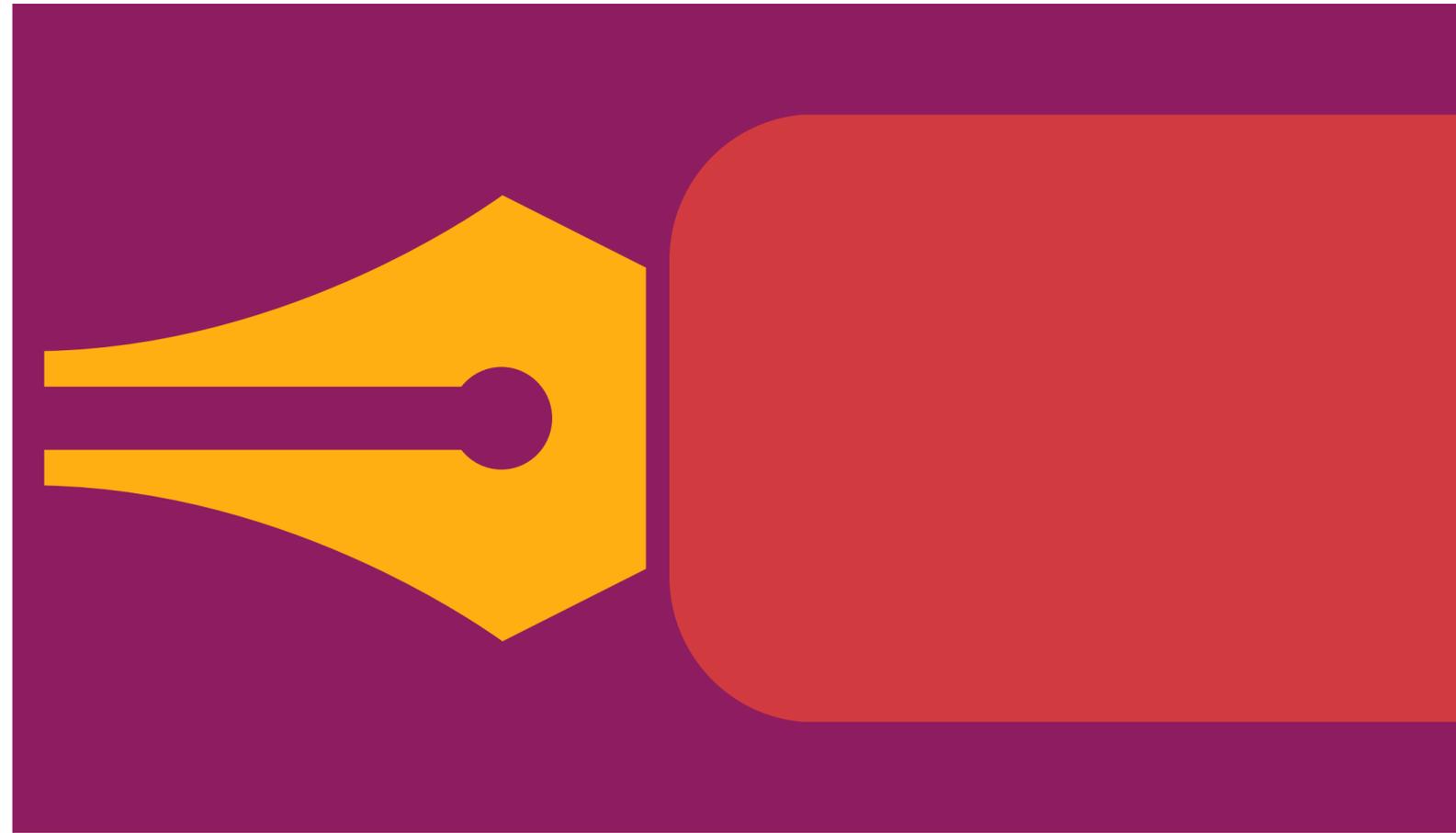
Mimicking illustrators on

Instagram is not the foundation of a long-term creative life. Word. Of those artists using other illustrators' work for inspiration, 77% find it on Social Media, around 50% find it on Pinterest or in books and 32% take inspiration from exhibitions.

37.

Do you actively try new tools and techniques?

Yes for traditional tools
11%
–
Yes for digital tools
32%
–
Yes for both
46%
–
No
10%



Q37. This, as we've had in previous years, is great to see, people are keeping up with developments in technology and experimenting with tools both on-screen and in the real world. We are stretching ourselves technically, but (following on from the previous questions) we need to do the same for our inspirations, our concepts, our ideas and our own evolution of illustration style.

Diversity

38.

When illustrating a general scene that includes people, would you actively include the following without being asked to do so?

- Children 68%
- Elderly people 59%
- Diverse family dynamics (eg. single or same sex parents) 58%
- Diverse nationalities or ethnic origins 93%
- Diverse cultural clothing 48%
- Disabled people 42%
- Same sex couples 55%

39.

Do you feel capable and comfortable depicting people who are different from you in some way (sexuality, ethnic origin etc)?

Yes 90%
No 10%

40.

Have clients provided you with reference images for religious or cultural dress whether it's relevant to the illustration topic or not?

Yes 30%
No 70%

41.

Have you discussed depicting a diversity of people with your clients in 2019?

Yes	47%
No	53%

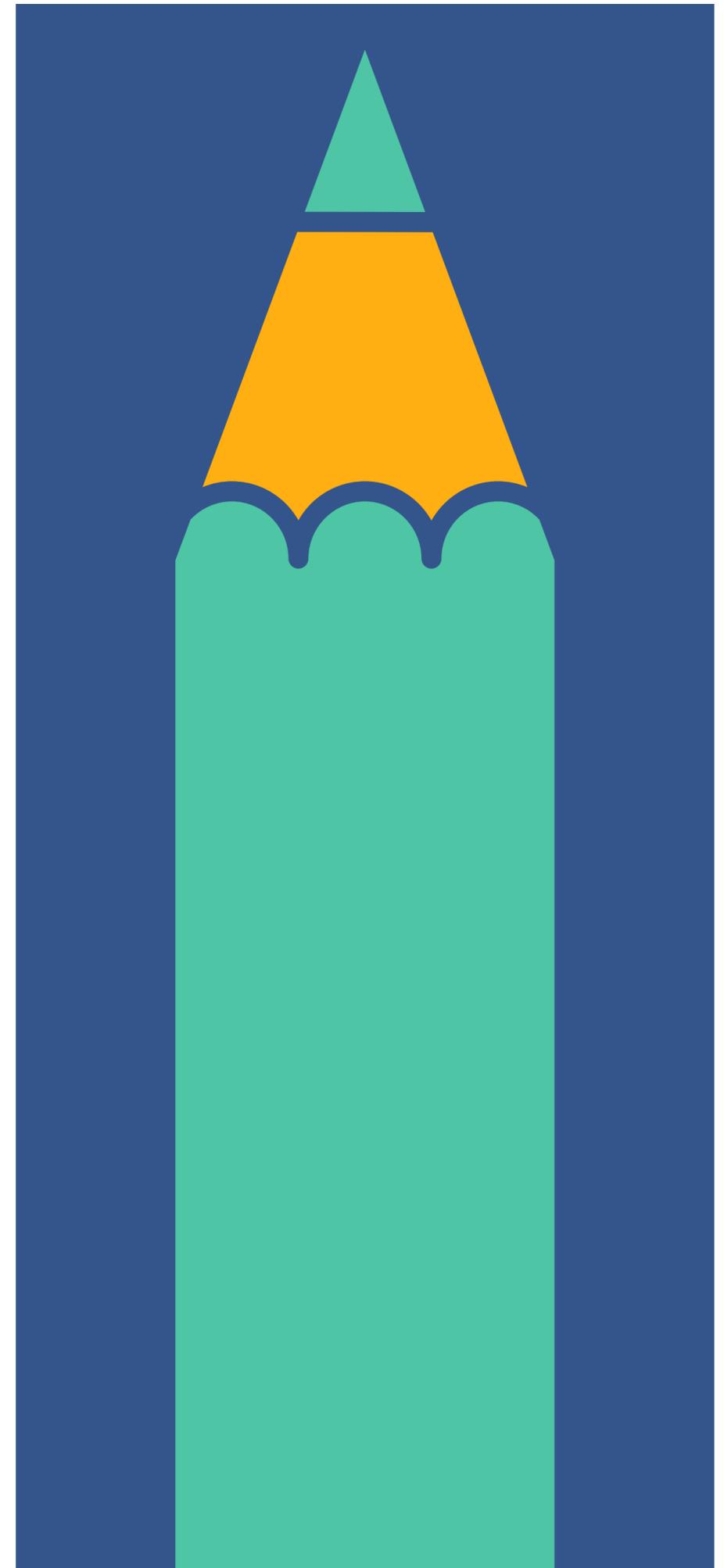
There are two sides to the Diversity conversation, firstly how we, as illustrators, depict diversity in our illustrations, and secondly the diversity of illustrators within the industry itself.

Q38 - 41.

Looking at depicting diversity, it looks like we're doing 'OK' but we can do better. Society is a mixture of people, so our illustrations should represent that, no-one can be forgotten. We have the power to show people that aren't always shown, which in turn will reach people in the real world and give everyone a fairer view on the diversity in society. Now, one question we need to ask here, do we need more resources to ensure we're depicting, cultural dress, the ability spectrum, gender variants correctly and effectively?

Of course it's not only crowd scenes, it's the heroes too, the central figures, members of the public need to see themselves depicted in commercial illustration, whatever the platform, there is no one formula as to what a human is, so don't restrict who you put front and centre.

We also need to talk to our commissioners, and this isn't the first issue to raise this point, we need to have open discussions with the publishing houses and advertising agencies to ensure we're fairly representing diversity in all our work.



42.

Do you think all races, LGBTQ+ and female professionals are fairly represented in our industry?

Yes 35%
No 65%

43.

Are we doing enough, as an industry, to be more inclusive of diversity?

Yes 33%
No 67%

Since starting the survey there has always been a particular issue which shines more than any other that year; with the first survey it was mental health issues, last year it was an awareness of pricing problems, and this year I can't see anything more alarming than the Diversity of illustrators. The two statistics above go hand-in-hand, with the figures being almost identical.

Two thirds of us don't think everyone is fairly represented (when it comes to events, magazine or blog features, teaching staff etc) and again, two thirds of us feel that not enough is being done to have a fully inclusive industry. So, what can we do?? Survey respondents were especially keen on more meet-ups offering a safe space for support and discussion for everyone, and an introduction of mentoring schemes to ensure more people reach a sustainable level in their career.

Survey Committee member Lisa Maltby commented "illustration seems to be a very privileged career — majority are white and studied at university level (see Q55). I think we have a long way to go with representing race and class and making it a more accessible industry that works hard to stop elitism."

On the same subject, committee member Mat Roff tells us that "I had a very interesting conversation with Alex Moore, who works on an MA Illustration course in London - she said there are hardly any male students on illustration courses like there used to be, and from the results there are far more female illustrators around or being activity involved, yet we're more aware of the white, male illustrator. That really is interesting and again we might need to look into that hierarchy too."

We know these issues are discussion points across so many industries and areas of society, but discussion isn't everything, we need proactive change, from schools, colleges and universities through to studios, agencies and corporations, we need to highlight artists who aren't getting the attention they deserve, we need events to stop filling the stage with successful white men, we need to help people who can't afford to go to university to still find a way into the industry, we need magazines, blogs and books to ensure there is no bias in who they are featuring and finally, committee member Katie Chappell wants to know one thing "60% of the survey participants were female, so I'd like to ask WHERE ARE THE FEMALE ILLUSTRATOR PODCASTS, PLEASE?"

Work/Life Balance

<p>44.</p> <p>Do you successfully balance client work and personal creative work?</p>	<p>Yes 44%</p> <p>No 56%</p>	<p>45.</p> <p>Which of the following would benefit you and your work?</p>	<p>Financial stability 77%</p> <p>–</p> <p>More relaxation 52%</p> <p>–</p> <p>More social time 41%</p>	<p>More exercise 65%</p> <p>–</p> <p>More sleep 44%</p> <p>–</p>
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<p>46.</p> <p>Do you regularly meet up with other illustrators?</p>	<p>Yes, and it's important to do so 31%</p> <p>–</p> <p>Yes, but it's not of great importance 5%</p> <p>–</p> <p>No, but I wish I did 57%</p> <p>–</p> <p>No, I don't feel the need 7%</p>
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Q44-46. These statistics have barely changed in 3 years now, we all need to find more time for personal work, and non-illustrative pursuits, whether they're social or physical or both. The only difference this year was the addition of 'Financial stability' in Q45 and with 77% feeling that would benefit their work, I think this could be the key to a lot of issues throughout the survey, committee member Mat Roff pointed out that if 55% of illustrators are mostly working on commissions under £500 (Q29) then it is highly likely that they're going to be yearning for more stability. Putting in a lot of time to a lot of low-budget projects, will not add up to financial stability, or leave you much time to focus on health and relaxation.

On the subject of financial stability, Survey Committee member Simon Whittaker asks that "It begs the question, is illustration a sustainable long-term career, and if not how can that be improved? Is that through commissioner education, is it legislation re minimum fees, payment dates, etc?"

47.

Which of the following social events would you be most excited to attend?

- Social get together 36%
- Organised meet-up / networking event 17%
- Group skill-based / learning workshop 27%
- Short talk, panel / screening event 12%
- Wider conference (1-3 days) 8%

48.

Do you feel you have mental health or confidence issues that affect your career?

Yes 66%

No 34%

Q48. This is down ever so slightly on previous years (last year it was 74%) but we're still in the same ballpark, and it's still an issue that we can all work together on.

We are talking about it, I'm proud of the 61% who have spoken about their mental health issues to an individual in-person, in fact I'm proud of any illustrator who is speaking about it. No-one is obliged to speak about it, there shouldn't be pressure to talk about it, especially to strangers online or in a group situation, but I know from my own experience that speaking one-to-one, online and in-person can help take some weight off.

If you do feel that you'd like to discuss mental health with me then please do get in touch on bentheillustrator@gmail.com

49.

If you have any issues with mental health, have you spoken out about it? (Selecting all that apply)

To an individual online 21%	To an individual in-person 61%
–	–
In a group online 8%	In a group in-person 12%
–	–
On social media 22%	No 32%

All About You

50.

How would you describe your gender?

Female
60%
–
Male
35%
–
Non Binary
3%
–
Prefer not to say
1%
–
Prefer to self describe
1%

51.

Which of the following best describes your ethnic origin?

White	Asian	Mixed
79%	7%	7%
–	–	–
Black	Arab	Other
3%	1%	1%
–	–	–
Prefer not to say		
2%		

For discussion on these statistics please do read the Diversity section.



52.

How old are you?

18 - 30
41%
–
41 - 50
16%
–
61+
2%

31 - 40
36%
–
51 - 60
5%
–

53.

Where do you work?

Home
72%
–
Shared studio
5%
–
Employed in-house
4%

Own studio
8%
–
Co-working space
2%
–
A combination
10%

54.

How do you create your work?

Mostly digital
50%
–
Mixed digital / traditional
40%
–
Mostly traditional
10%

55.

Did you study illustration at university level?

Studied illustration
45%
–
Studied a non-creative subject
9%

Studied another creative subject
39%
–
Didn't go to university
7%

56.

Open Question : What are your interests outside of illustration?

Reading	28%
Music (listening)	23%
Film	20%
Travel	18%
Cooking / Baking	16%
Video Gaming	15%
Walking / Hiking	13%
Nature / Wildlife	10%
General Fitness / Sport	10%
Graphic Design	9%
Fine Arts	9%
Animation	6%
Photography	6%
Writing	6%

With the following all below 5%

Family / Kids, Gardening, Cycling, General Socialising, Running, Comics, History, Dogs, Politics / Activism, Yoga, Science, Fashion, Football, Board Games, Crafts, Swimming, Architecture, Playing Music and Singing, Theatre, Museums, Climbing, Psychology, TV, Sewing, Dancing, Podcasts, Ceramics, Cats, Philosophy, Sleeping, Skateboarding, Knitting, DIY, Comedy, Sustainability, Coffee, Skiing, Tennis, Care, Martial Arts, Technology.

Finishing on a positive, we're a good crew, aren't we? We're creative (in more than just illustration) and open to new things, we enjoy travel and the outdoors (when we make time for it). We're fairly social (but it would help if we were more so), we have an array of creative interests (yet we look to other illustrators for inspiration?), we like to play, we prefer dogs to cats and appear to rate coffee over tea (which no-one considered to be an interest, even though we must go through plenty of it between us).

Thank you so much for reading through the results, as ever everyone involved is hopeful that these statistics can bring about change and that the results can be used to further your career as an illustrator.

As with previous years we still have issues around pricing and mental health, and as an industry we must work together to bring clarity to both issues. But this year the biggest issue is perhaps diversity, how can we bring more people into the industry to build their own sustainable careers, without a university education or financial support? How can we ensure all artists of any gender, ethnic origin or background can be seen, heard or given a stage, be nominated for awards and offered teaching positions. We also need to illustrate the beautiful diversity of humans in our work, every one of us has the power to make a hero out of a refugee, a disabled child or an elderly grandmother,

When it comes to depicting diversity, whether it's ethnic origin, national dress, gender, physical/mental ability or any other aspect, would we appreciate more resources to ensure we're illustrating people correctly?

One positive step for diversity issues could also resolve other problems... we need to open up more conversations with our clients, we need to discuss pricing our projects or who we're depicting, we need to work closely with our clients to make the industry better across the board.

Finally, we can help each other, we have great connections between peers at the same stage of their journey, but we need to keep making connections from the new graduates to the experienced artists, whether it's through mentoring programmes or social media conversations. We also need to ensure more colleges and universities are teaching professional practice to their illustration students, to understand pricing, negotiating, managing themselves and all the other wonders of being a professional illustrator.

Finally... THANKS. Thanks to everyone who participated and filled in the survey, thanks to the wonderful committee of illustrators who helped to curate and analyse the questions, thanks to Adobe, Cass Art, The AOI and Survey Monkey for together making it all happen this year. And thanks to you for reading it and being one of the illustrators who makes the profession something to be proud of.

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