WHAT ARE WORDS WORTH NOW?

Further findings

A survey of authors' earnings

Researchers:
Professor Phillip Johnson, Cardiff University; Professor Johanna Gibson, Queen Mary, University of London; and Dr Gaetano Dimita, Queen Mary, University of London.

Supported by:

© The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society 2017. All rights reserved.
Following the headline findings last year, the full research (The Business of Being an Author) has now been published by Queen Mary, University of London.

This research was commissioned by the Authors’ Licensing & Collecting Society and conducted by Queen Mary, University of London.

Any comparisons shown are against research carried out by the University of Bournemouth in 2005, details of which can be found on the ALCS website.

The majority of respondents were professional authors who spent most of their working lives writing.

Overall the respondents represented a varied group, writing in different contexts and for diverse markets.

Respondents included:

- Academic
- Teacher
- Journalist
- Author/illustrator
- Comedian
- Scriptwriter
- Playwright
- Translator
- Editor
- Poet
- Poet
- Editor
- Poet
- Poet
- Poet

Earning a living solely from writing

- 2005 - 40% of professional authors earned their income solely from writing
- 2013 - 11.5% of professional authors earn their income solely from writing

The world of the professional author

In 2005, 40% of authors earned their income solely from writing. By 2013 this had dropped to just 11.5%.

The typical (median) incomes of professional authors

There has been a drop in the typical income from writing of professional authors of 29% in real terms since 2005.

Median income of professional authors

- Real terms earnings
- Actual earnings

£15,450

£12,330

£11,000

2005

2013
The career of a typical, professional author begins in late 20s/early 30s. Earnings increase, with the optimum earning age for most in their mid-40s to 50s, the income then starts to decline.

Professional authors continue to earn after their ‘retirement’, either because they are still writing, or because their existing body of work continues to generate income.

**Income: highs and lows**

A small majority are doing very well - **The top 5% earned 42.3%** of all the money earned by professional authors in this survey.

The larger majority aren’t doing very well - **The bottom 50% (earning £10,432 or less) earn only 7%** of all the money earned by all writers cumulatively.

Nearly 90% need to earn money from sources other than writing.

Only 11.5% of professional authors relied solely on the income they receive from writing. 17% of all writers did not earn any money from writing in 2013.

---

**Advances**

Advances are on the decline across the board

2/3rds of all respondents had received an advance at some point in their career. The number of authors receiving advances is in decline since 2006.

The size of advances is falling with 44% stating the value of their advances had declined over the past 5 years.

**Buy-out contracts**

A Buy-out contract is one where there is a single payment for use of the work without the further payment of royalties.

46% of authors have signed a buy-out contract at some point in their career.

**Self-Publishing**

The **top 10% earners** among self-published authors made a profit of £7,000 or more.

The **top 20% earners** among self-published authors made a profit of nearly £3,000.

The **bottom 20% earners** among self-published authors made losses of at least £400.