

# PRESS RELEASE



**The Royal Society  
of Literature**

## **A Room of My Own: new survey reveals what writers need to work today**

**90 years after the publication of Virginia Woolf's seminal essay  
*A Room of One's Own*, the RSL asked UK writers about the support they receive,  
the challenges they face, and what they need to work.**

The survey found:

- Writers today still need a space to write from, but peer and emotional support are now more important than money;
- The vast majority of writers do not earn the income that Virginia Woolf argued a writer needs – £500 a year, equivalent to just over £30,000 in 2019;
- Only 10% of writers are able to support themselves through their writing income alone: a writer is almost three times as likely to earn over £30,000 outside of writing than in it;
- Pay gaps in relation to social class identity, gender identity, ethnicity and geographic region are greater in a writing career than in employment outside it;
- While the majority of writers experience challenges early in their writing lives, a writer's background, experience or identity affects the challenges they experience.

The RSL sought to hear from writers working professionally and from those aspiring to do so. Significantly, this report shows not only those who have been able to earn from their writing careers but also those who have experienced barriers to their ambitions.

Published on 19 June by the Royal Society of Literature, the **A Room of My Own** report presents findings from a survey of over 2,000 writers aged 16+ in the UK. The Audience Agency collected and analysed the data arising from the survey. It was funded by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS).

**The full report will be on our website [www.rsliterature.org.uk](http://www.rsliterature.org.uk) on 19 June.**

Founded in 1820, **The Royal Society of Literature** is the UK's charity for the advancement of literature. It acts as a voice for the value of literature, honours and encourages great writers, and engages the public in literature.

**Contact Annette Brook for speakers available for interview and comment.**

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## Report summary (embargoed until 19 June)

<p>What a writer needs to work</p>	<p>Ninety years after Virginia Woolf's <i>A Room of One's Own</i>, a room to write from and money are still important to sustaining a career in writing.</p> <p>However, peer support and emotional support are now seen as significant to more writers than financial support.</p>	<p>Writers told us the most significant kinds of support to them were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80% a room of their own</li> <li>• 65% peer support</li> <li>• 60% emotional support</li> <li>• 58% financial support</li> </ul>
<p>The support a writer receives</p>	<p>The vast majority of writers do not earn the income that Virginia Woolf argued a writer needs – £500 a year, equivalent to just over £30,000 in 2019.</p> <p>The majority of writer respondents earned below £10,000 from their writing in 2018.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5% of writers earned over £30,000 from their writing in 2018</li> <li>• 67% of writers in a career (who earned anything from their writing in 2018) earned £10,000 or less</li> </ul>
	<p>Only a small minority of writers are able to support themselves through their writing income alone.</p> <p>A writer is almost three times as likely to earn over £30,000 outside of writing than in it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10% of writers do not have jobs or any other form of financial support beyond their writing</li> <li>• 52% have freelance, temporary or part-time paid employment; 20% are in full-time paid employment</li> <li>• 5% of writers earn over £30,000 from writing; 14% earn the same outside writing</li> </ul>
	<p>Writing is a career in which opportunities are currently far greater for those from privileged backgrounds.</p> <p>Pay gaps in relation to social class identity, gender identity, ethnicity and geographic region are greater in a writing career than in employment outside it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social class identity:</b> 25% of all respondents identified as working class, but they make up only 11% of the highest earners from writing (earning over £30,000 from writing in 2018)</li> <li>• <b>Ethnicity:</b> 13% of all respondents identified as being from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, but are only 9% of the highest earners from writing</li> <li>• <b>Gender:</b> 72% of all respondents identified as female, but they made up 57% of the highest earners from writing; in comparison, respondents identifying as male made up 25% of overall respondents but 41% of those with the highest incomes from writing</li> <li>• <b>Geographic region:</b> 66% of the highest earners lived in London or the South of England</li> </ul>

<p>The challenges a writer faces</p>	<p>The greatest challenges faced by writers at the beginnings of their careers are a lack of money and time to write.</p> <p>The majority of writers also found lack of confidence in their abilities, and a lack of information about the support available to them, challenging early on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 68% found lack of financial income or expectation of it in the future a challenge to their early writing life</li> <li>• 67% identified lack of time to write as a challenge</li> <li>• 54% identified lack of confidence in their ability as a challenge</li> <li>• 53% identified lack of information about financial support available to them as a challenge</li> </ul>
	<p>While the majority of writers experience challenges early in their writing lives, a writer's background, experience or identity affects the challenges they experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of income or expectation of it:</b> 70% of women (compared to 59% of men)</li> <li>76% of BAME writers (compared to 67% of white writers)</li> <li>74% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (compared to 67% of writers without a disability or long-term health condition)</li> <li>• <b>Lack of time:</b> 25% of writers from BAME backgrounds are in full-time employment (compared to 19% of white writers)</li> <li>• <b>Lack of confidence:</b> 59% of women (compared to 39% of men)</li> <li>• <b>Lack of information about sources of financial support:</b> 65% of working class writers (compared to 48% of middle class writers)</li> <li>66% of BAME writers (compared to 52% of white writers)</li> <li>63% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (compared to 51% of writers without a disability or long-term health condition)</li> </ul>
<p>The words that sustain a writer</p>	<p>Writers today rely on emotional and peer support to pursue a career in writing – and the words of other writers and readers are part of what sustains them.</p> <p>Being told that their voices are important, and to persevere through rejections early on, encourages writers to begin a literary career and to continue on through their writing lives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asked for the piece of advice that encourages them to pursue a career in writing, the most common were to persist through rejection, and that their voices are important</li> </ul>