



The Royal Society *of Literature*

A Room of My Own

What writers need to work today

June 2019

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Contents

Foreword	6
Introduction and commentary	7
Background, aims and methodology	9
The findings	
1. The support a writer needs	11
2. The support a writer receives	13
3. The challenges a writer faces	21
4. The words that sustain a writer	28
Appendix: UK writers 2019	31
Acknowledgements	

Summary

<p>The support a writer needs</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"> • 80% a room of their own • 65% peer support • 60% emotional support • 58% financial support
<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"> • 5% of writers earned over £30,000 from their writing in 2018 • 67% of writers in a career (who earned anything from their writing in 2018) earned £10,000 or less
	<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 from work outside writing than in it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% of writers do not have jobs or any other form of financial support beyond their writing • 52% have freelance, temporary or part-time paid employment; 20% are in full-time paid employment • 5% of writers earn over £30,000 from writing; 14% earn the same outside writing
	<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"> • Social class identity: 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) • Ethnicity: 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 • Gender: 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 and 41% of those with the highest incomes from writing • Geographic region: 66% of the highest earners from writing lived in London or the South of England

<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"> • 68% found lack of financial income or expectation of it in the future a challenge to their early writing life • 67% identified lack of time to write as a challenge • 54% identified lack of confidence in their ability as a challenge • 53% identified lack of information about financial support available to them as a challenge
	<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"> • Lack of income or expectation of it: 70% of women (compared to 59% of men) 76% of BAME writers (compared to 67% of white writers) 74% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (compared to 67% of writers without a disability or long-term health condition) • Lack of time: 25% of writers from BAME backgrounds are in full-time employment (compared to 19% of white writers) • Lack of confidence: 59% of women (compared to 39% of men) • Lack of information about sources of financial support: 65% of working class writers (compared to 48% of middle class writers) 66% of BAME writers (compared to 52% of white writers) 63% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (compared to 51% of writers without a disability or long-term health condition)
<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"> • 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

Foreword

Making a life in writing has never been a straightforward proposition. There are the hurdles of craft - honing a voice, finding that 'mot juste', Flaubert's 'exact word'. Then there are the stumbling blocks of persistence, of carving out time for the kind of attentiveness writing demands. All that before you even begin to face the everyday challenges of earning your keep as a professional writer.

Virginia Woolf famously called for 'a room of one's own' and £500 a year (equivalent to just over £30,000 at today's rates). Yet only an astonishingly small 5% of writers earn over £30,000 a year. They may rarely sustain even that regularly throughout a working life. This is despite the fact that some 184,000 books a year are published in the UK, while in 2017 sales income for books and journals rose to £5.7 billion, of which 60% were export sales. Given that writers are also crucial to stage, film, television, and games, not to mention the translation of all the above, we are primary producers who contribute far more to this great industry and to the economy of the UK than we take out.

As for the non-financial contribution, this is incalculable: literature inspires, makes society a place worth living in, indeed can help to give clarity to ambivalence and to meld atomised individuals into a society. Filled with individual voices, with stories new and old and with argument, literature is a space of vibrant ongoing conversations. These can counter loneliness, boost the fascination of the everyday, and make its sufferings more comprehensible. We need writers of all descriptions

and all backgrounds. We need them to flourish. We need their stories.

As the great Toni Morrison enjoined in her Nobel Prize lecture: "Make up a story... For our sake and yours ...tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don't tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief's wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear's caul." A multiplicity of individual voices matters. Literature matters.

So, as the Royal Society of Literature approaches its bicentenary and spurred by the example of Virginia Woolf whom we now celebrate annually on Dalloway Day, we set out to elaborate the state of writers' lives today, how class, ethnicity, gender play through their writing lives and what it is writers themselves say they most need in order to thrive. For me, one of this report's most telling points is the emphasis writers today place on the desire for support, for feedback and connection. It may well be that the RSL's place as a Fellowship of writers is more crucial than ever before as we approach our 200th year.

Dr Lisa Appignanesi OBE FRSL

Chair

Royal Society of Literature Council

Introduction and commentary

The A Room of My Own survey

In 1928, Virginia Woolf delivered two essays on “Women and Fiction”, discussing what a woman writer needed to work. In what would be published a year later as *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf took on the practical challenges a writer faces, particularly a writer shut out of libraries, unwelcome in the places other writers are accepted and encouraged. Woolf wrote that a woman needed money and a room of her own to write. Ninety years on, in 2019, the A Room of My Own survey asked writers working today what they need to pursue a career in literature, and to flourish professionally.

The Royal Society of Literature – the UK’s charity for the advancement of literature – has for nearly 200 years worked to ‘reward literary merit and excite literary talent’. In the lead up to our bicentenary in 2020, we recognise that literature is more vital, interesting, and compelling when it communicates the variety of experience and voice that exists across the UK. In this survey, we asked writers to tell us what they need to work, and through this report, we hope to contribute to a literary landscape endeavouring to make a life in writing possible for writers of all backgrounds and experiences. Woolf wrote, “There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.” With this report, we seek to find ways in which those who work with writers can translate that freedom of mind into the opportunity, the freedom, for all to write.

Writers in the UK today

Over 2,000 writers completed the survey, indicating the great number of people seeking a life in writing now. People of different ages, backgrounds and experiences in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are aspiring to a literary life: literature is thriving.

In asking to complete this survey any writer, aged 16 or over and resident in the UK, currently earning money from writing or intending to in the future,

“It is writers’ voices that this report seeks to emphasise...and from their experiences to see how literature in the UK can grow, expand and change.”

the RSL sought to hear not only from those writers working professionally now but from those aspiring to do so. This means writers just beginning and writers working for some time without finding the opportunities for paid employment in literature. Significantly, this report shows not only those who have been able to earn from their literary careers but also those who have experienced barriers to their ambitions.

The writers who responded to this survey told us the kinds of support – financial, practical, emotional – they receive; they told us the challenges that they experience early in their careers; what their aspirations are; and what they would change about their writing lives.

As important as the questions we asked was the information that writers gave about their backgrounds, identities and experiences. Writers gave their incomes from writing and from employment outside it; they told us where in the UK they live; their ethnicities; their gender identities; their sexualities; their ages; and whether they have a disability or long-term health condition. Writers also told us their social class identity.

With recent exploration of the experiences of working class writers, including the publication *Common People: An Anthology of Working Class Writers*, edited by Kit de Waal and published by Unbound this year, and research such as *The Bookseller’s 2019* report into class in the publishing industry, we wanted to know particularly whether a writer’s personal class identity impacts on their professional opportunities. In the last question of this survey, we asked writers for the term that best represents how they think of their social class. This might be tied to their family background or, if different, it could be the class they feel now. In-keeping with the survey’s other questions, which ask for a writer’s self-identification of their experience and background, and for anecdotal accounts of their writing lives, we have not sought to identify a writer’s social class by any means other than a writer’s own sense of it. In the appendix – UK Writers 2019 – you can see more detailed information about the writers who responded to this survey, and the range of writers working across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It is writers’ voices that this report seeks to emphasise. You will find the verbatim accounts writers gave of their careers, needs and aspirations throughout. In listening to their experiences, we want to see how literature in the UK can grow, expand and change.

The information these 2,166 writers have given us provides vital insight into the challenges that some writers face. Throughout this report, where there are notable differences in the given experiences of writers who identify as being from specific demographic backgrounds or as a person with a disability or long-term health condition, we have identified those differences. They fall into patterns, ones we might anticipate from anecdotal evidence in our own lives and from the findings of other reports. But with this research, the opportunity to quantify reported experiences of writers from different backgrounds allows us to see these correlations more clearly, in sharper focus. What we find is that a writer's background, experience or identity impacts the support they receive and the challenges they face.

What a writer needs to work

In analysing the information writers so generously gave, we find not only a picture of what life as a writer is today – the different means by which a writer survives – but also the extraordinary vibrancy of literature in the UK, in the face of challenging circumstances. We know from recent reports into the earnings of writers and the literature industry – including the 2018 Authors' Earnings report commissioned by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) and carried out by CREATE, and *The Bookseller's* research into class in publishing – that a life in writing is becoming harder, and that writers of particular backgrounds and experiences face greater challenges when seeking to establish a professional career. The findings of this report confirm this. We see that a writer still needs money and a space to write from. But across the range of writers who responded, we also find that support from peers in mentoring and networks, and emotional support from friends and family, are seen by writers themselves as significant to more writers than money is. It is encouraging to see the range of support that writers receive, and the living ecology of a community in literature providing that support. This includes writer development organisations, publishers, agents, unions, writers' retreats, universities, public funding bodies and organisations that work in many other ways to make a writing life possible. In these findings, however, we also see that there is more work to be done to make the opportunity of pursuing this career truly available to writers of all backgrounds, identities and experiences.

A life in writing – a self-sustained career in writing – is something that many people find beyond their opportunity. While writing can be inexpensive in

“We continue to need to interrogate, as people invested in literature: the means of writing, the access to those means, and the importance of disrupting any limitation in who a writer can be.”

relation to other art forms that incur greater material or direct expense, the financial cost of time away from paid work is prohibitive for those without independent wealth or sustained financial support through other means. The findings of this survey show what many of us know anecdotally: people with a disability or long-term health condition, people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, people from particular geographic regions of the UK, and people who self-identify as working class are disproportionately affected by the conditions of a writing life. These are the people who are more likely to be in full-time employment that pushes their writing hours to the margins of their lives, they are those who are more likely to experience discrimination as a challenge to their early careers, those who feel their opportunities limited by the geographic – often metropolitan-focussed – opportunities to earn an income from the events and networks that living in certain places affords.

Virginia Woolf, in her 1929 essay, did not consider the expansive and diverse community of writers we present in this report. But she did point us to what we continue to need to interrogate, as people invested in literature: the means of writing, the access to those means, and the importance of disrupting any limitation to who a writer can be.

The *A Room of My Own* report, published on the RSL's second Dalloway Day, shows us a picture of the great number of writers working in the UK now, and indicates the work there is to be done to make a writing life a possibility to more people.

Molly Rosenberg

Director

Royal Society of Literature

Background and aims of the research

This report summarises the stated experience of writers across the UK, providing information about the support that writers receive, the challenges that they face to their professional writing careers, and what they most need in order to work. The report is based on a sample of 2,166 respondents, giving a margin of error of c. $\pm 2\%$, at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% sure that if we had asked any of the questions shown to the entire population of writers in the UK, a proportion of no more than between 2% higher and 2% lower than the one given would have also picked that answer. The margin of error is greater for questions where fewer respondents answered, or where analysis has been applied using the demographic information supplied by respondents, reducing the size of that specific sample.

The survey was commissioned by the Royal Society of Literature, the UK's charity for the advancement of literature. Founded in 1820, the RSL runs literary activities, including public events, prizes, publications and young people's outreach. It is governed by its Fellowship of distinguished writers. Leading to its bicentenary in 2020, the RSL is generating public debate about the value of literature, and exploring how the UK's literary culture over 200 years has changed. We act as a voice for the value of literature, engage people in appreciating literature, and encourage and honour writers.

With this survey, the RSL marks 90 years since the publication of Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*, asking if it is still money and a room of one's own – as Woolf argued – that a writer needs to work today, and if there are other forms of support that are essential to a writing life. The RSL consulted with partner organisations that work with writers across the UK to ensure that the multitude of support and challenges to writers were represented in the questions. The survey gives evidence of the different forms of support writers receive now. With the findings of reports into writers' earnings and the experiences of those establishing a professional career in writing – including ALCS' 2018 Authors' Earnings report, *The Bookseller's* research into working class writers and publishers, Arts Council England's 2017 'Literature in the 21st Century: Understanding Models of Support for Literary Fiction' report, and Spread the Word's 2015 'Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the UK Marketplace' report – the *A Room of My Own* report particularly explores what challenges are faced by writers from backgrounds underrepresented in professional writing. This report aims to provide information about those in

a career in writing (earning any money from their writing) and those aspiring to a literary career (aiming to earn money from it in the future), so that those working for the advancement of literature have clear guidance from writers themselves of what support can extend the UK's literary culture.

The RSL asked writers about a range of support they received, the support that is most significant to them, the challenges they faced early in their careers and the advice that sustains them in their writing lives.

Dalloway Day

This report is published on Dalloway Day – an annual day celebrating Virginia Woolf's work. In 2019, the RSL marks 90 years of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* by asking writers today what they need to write. The *A Room of My Own* programme includes this report, an anthology of new essays from RSL Fellows, workshops in state schools across the UK and a competition for 14- to 18-year-olds. On Dalloway Day 2019, the RSL is working with partners including the Charleston Trust, Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain, National Portrait Gallery, British Library and English Heritage, and independent reading groups, on events across the UK.

Methodology

The survey was distributed by the Royal Society of Literature and its consulting partners Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Creative Scotland, Literature Wales, Literature Works, National Centre for Writing, New Writing North, New Writing South, Scottish Book Trust, Scottish Poetry Library, Society of Authors, Spread the Word, The Literary Consultancy, Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Writing East Midlands and Writing West Midlands. It was funded by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS).

Adults aged 16 and over, resident in the UK, who think of themselves as writers were invited to take part in the survey. The e-survey was open between 2 April and 30 April 2019.

The Audience Agency collected and analysed the data arising from the survey.

Notes to sample analysis

For lower reporting groups within the sample, the margin of error in responses is greater, so results are only indicative. This is particularly the case in relation to responses from writers in Northern Ireland. While the responding writers from Northern Ireland are an approximately representative sample (2% of the survey respondents and 3% of the UK population), the relatively lower number of respondents means that findings for Northern Ireland are less robust than for other geographic regions. Similarly, the sample size for writers who identify their gender in a way other than male or female is smaller and results from this group are indicative, at a higher margin of error.

Due to the relatively low number of writers who primarily write literary journalism, literary translation, graphic fiction or who identified 'other' as their primary literary form, responses from these writers have been grouped. This overall group comprises 5% of the overall sample.

BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) includes those who identified as being from Black or Black British, Asian or Asian British, Mixed Race, and Other (non-white) backgrounds. Although 'BAME' is an imperfect term, we wanted the findings of this report to relate and be comparable to those of the Office of National Statistics and research conducted by the Arts Councils of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and Creative Scotland.

Geographic regions of the UK that respondents live in have been grouped using the postcodes respondents reported. Where regions have been grouped it is in relation to the size of the given

sample, to ensure that findings were robust with a lower margin of error. The eight geographic area groups are: East of England, London, Midlands, North of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, South of England and Wales.

Income was banded in line with the majority of responses to ensure an adequate sample size for each reporting group and ensure the veracity of findings.

The findings

1. The support a writer needs

Key finding

- The majority of writers need a room to write from (80%), as well as peer (65%), emotional (60%) and financial (58%) support to work

We asked writers what the most significant kinds of support to them were. These ranged from financial support – including advances from publishers, commissioning fees, UK state benefits and grants funding time to write – to emotional support from friends or family and peer support, including mentoring from other writers.

These can be grouped into the following forms of support, in order of the number of respondents who identified them as key to their current writing careers:

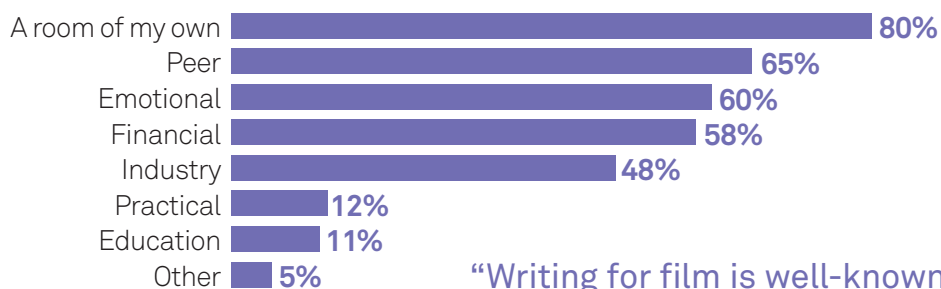
- A room of my own – space to write 80%
- Peer 65%
- Emotional 60%
- Financial 58%
- Industry 48%
- Practical 12%
- Education 11%

From the responses, we can see that a broad range of support is needed for writers to work today, with each of these forms of support cited as significant to more than 10% of the writers.

Key to respondents was support from their writer peers – through mentoring, networking, workshops and masterclasses – as well as emotional support from family and friends.

Whether a writer is earning from their writing or not has an impact on the kind of support they need. While an average of 65% of all respondents cited peer support, it was even more significant to those writers not yet earning (77% compared to 56% of those currently earning). Financial support is more significant to those in a career than those pursuing one (71% compared to 42%).

1.a The support that is significant to a writer now

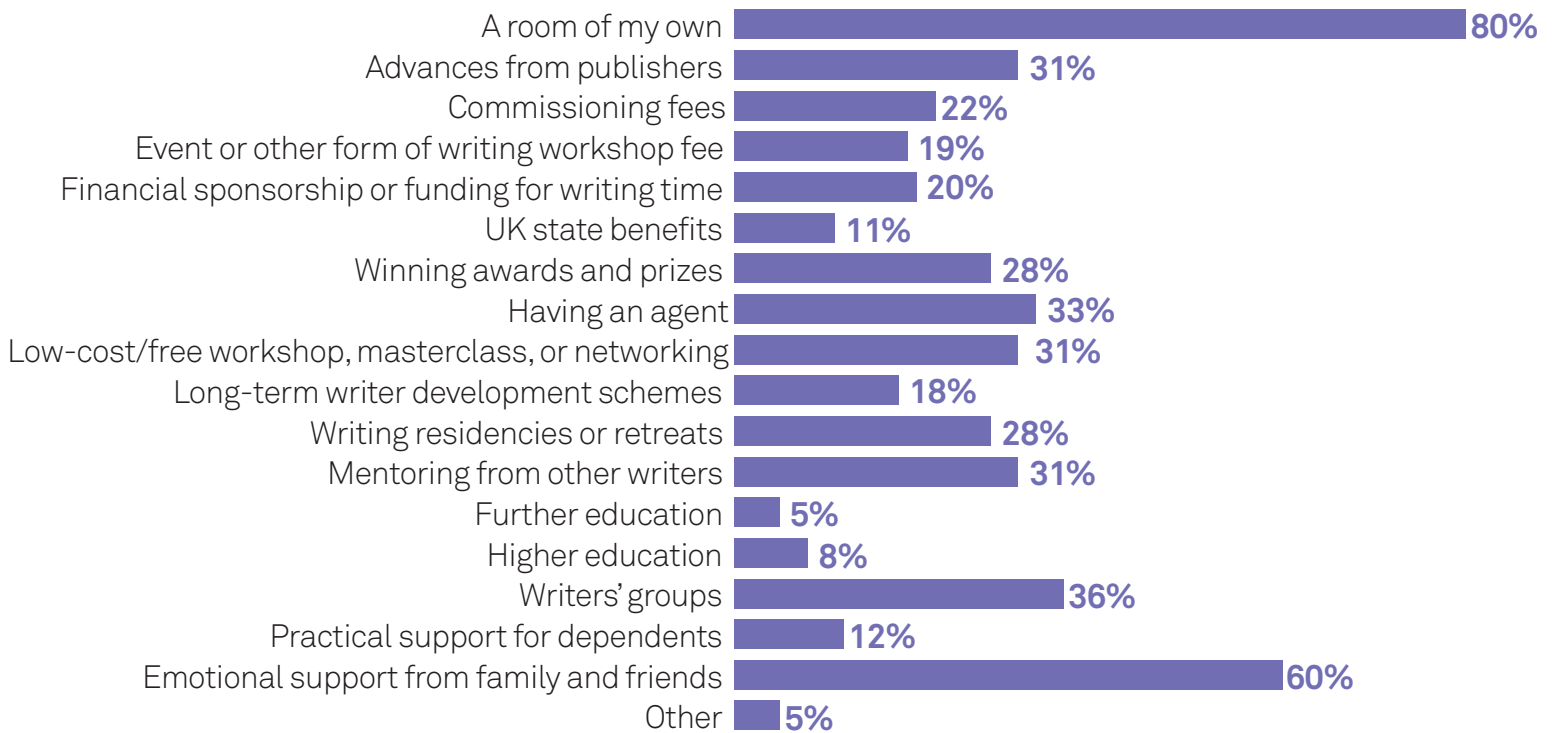


“I need a mentor in order to get to where I need to be with my writing.”

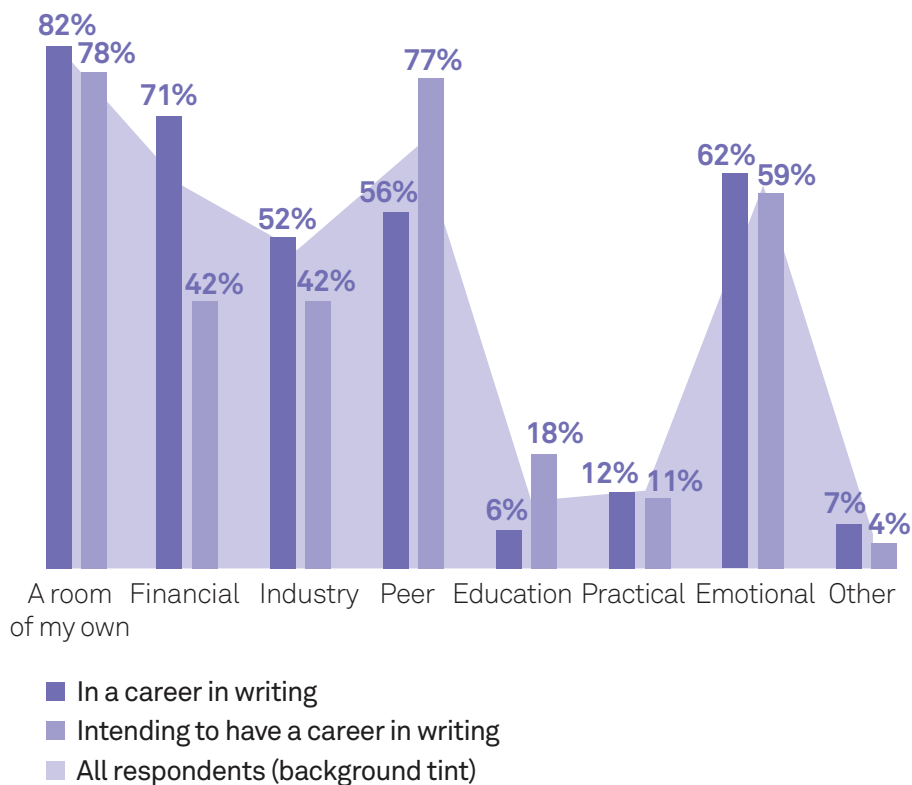
“Writing for film is well-known to be difficult to break into, precarious and low-paid for beginning writers. But I can trace my successful periods directly to the times when those closest to me were supportive and accepting of the sacrifices I have made to get where I am.”

“Extended writing was difficult when I was a single mother of three children, but I always made a point of having a specific space/room to write in.”

1.b The support that is most significant to a writer now – detailed from all respondents



1.c The support that is significant to a writer now – by whether they are in a career or intending a career in writing



2. The support a writer receives

How do writers earn their incomes?

Key findings

- Only 5% of respondents earned from their writing the income Virginia Woolf argued a writer needs in *A Room of One's Own* – £500 a year, equivalent to just over £30,000 in 2019
- 67% of respondents who identified as having a career in writing (who earned anything from their writing in 2018) earned £10,000 or less
- Only 10% of writers have no income or financial support beyond their writing
- Across all respondents, a writer was almost three times as likely to earn over £30,000 outside of writing than in it: 5% earned over £30,000 from writing, 14% earned the same outside writing
- Where a writer lives has an impact on their earnings from writing, with writers in the South of England and London paid the most, and writers in the North of England, Wales and Northern Ireland the least

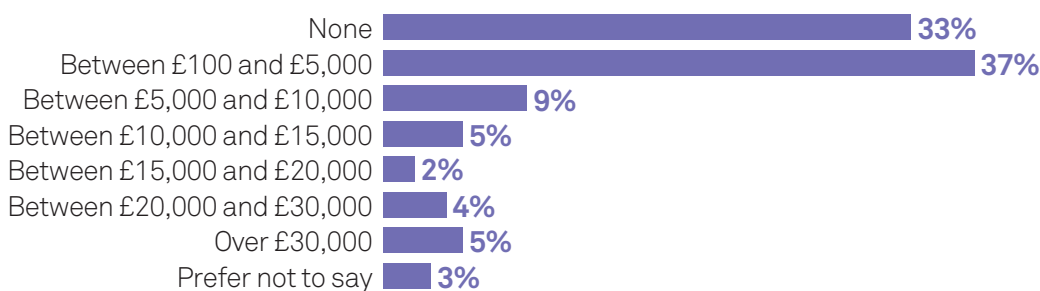
What are writers' incomes from writing?

The respondents reported their incomes in 2018, from their writing and from employment outside it. Their writing income included earnings from commissions, royalties, awards, advances and payments for leading short-course workshops or masterclasses.

Almost two-thirds (62%) of writers who earned any money from their writing in 2018 earned **between £100 and £10,000**. These findings are slightly lower than those of the ALCS Authors' Earnings report, due to the sample of writer respondents (ALCS findings report on 'primary occupation' writers – those who spend at least half of their time writing – where the *A Room of My Own* findings report on writers who have earned any income from their writing). Typical 'primary occupation' writers' incomes have decreased from an equivalent of £18,013 in 2006 to £10,497 in 2018 (ALCS, Authors' Earnings report, 2018).

Overall, both the Authors' Earnings report and the *A Room of My Own* report show that most writers earned under the UK minimum wage (£15,629) in 2018.

2.a Income from writing – all respondents



“Being a writer is a job, not a hobby. Writers need to be paid for their work and not be expected to work for free.”

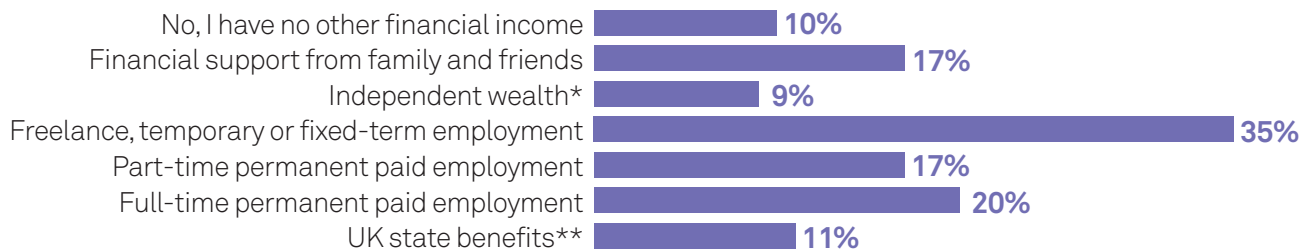
“If I can't get paid for my writing, is there any point in pursuing it?”

Do writers have employment beyond writing?

The vast majority of writers have paid employment beyond their writing – only 10% have no income or financial support beyond their writing. Of all respondents –

- 35% selected freelance, temporary or fixed-term employment outside their writing
- 20% selected full-time permanent employment
- 17% selected part-time permanent employment

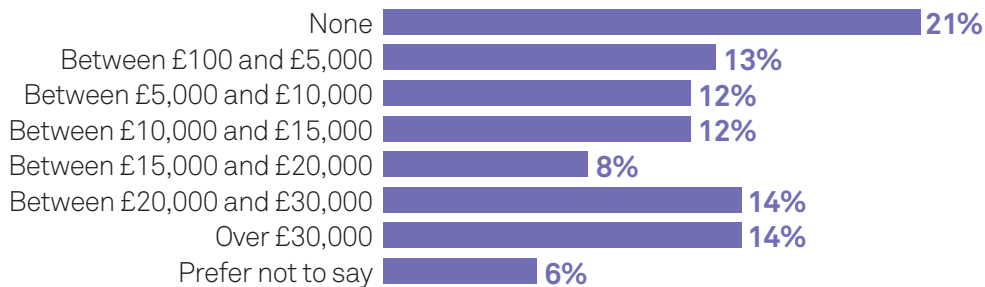
2.b Financial income and support other than through writing – all respondents



*including inherited; not from current employment

**e.g Universal Credit/Child Tax Credit/Jobseeker's Allowance etc.

2.c Financial income from means outside writing – all respondents



“With a demanding full-time job of a teacher, and other commitments, I find it incredibly difficult finding quality time and space to write. I’m often on public transport or if I’m lucky I might have some time to go to a café. It’s also difficult for me to attend literary help events.”

“I was very fortunate to have the time and space to write when I started writing seriously, I was working part-time and have no dependents. I waited a long time to start though, until we were financially secure. I wouldn’t/couldn’t have started if I had had to find funding somehow.”

Who earns the most from writing and from other employment?

A writer's background impacts their earnings from writing.

From the survey's findings, all respondents were more likely to earn a higher salary (over £30,000) from employment beyond writing rather than from writing itself. However, writers who identified being from privileged backgrounds were more likely to earn the highest salaries from writing and from other employment. Middle class¹ writers comprise the majority of top earners from their writing (70%), with working class writers underrepresented in the highest incomes –

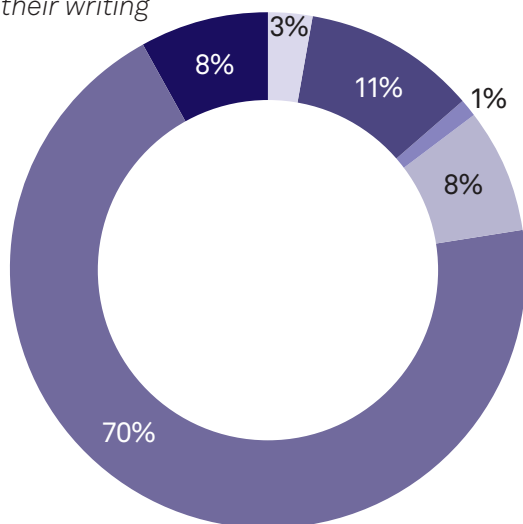
- **25% of all respondents identified as working class**, but they made up only **11% of the highest earners from writing** (earning over £30,000 from writing in 2018)
- **54% of all respondents identified as middle class**, and they made up **70% of the highest earners** (earning over £30,000 from writing)

There is a pronounced class pay gap in earnings, but particularly for earnings within writing, rather than from employment outside it. A higher proportion of working class writers earn over £30,000 outside writing than in it –

- 11% of those earning most from writing identified as **working class**, but they were **17% of the highest earners outside writing** (earning over £30,000 from means other than writing)
- 70% of those earning most from their writing identified as **middle class**, but they make up **62% of the highest earners outside writing** (earning over £30,000 from means other than writing)

2.d Top earnings for writers – by self-identified social class

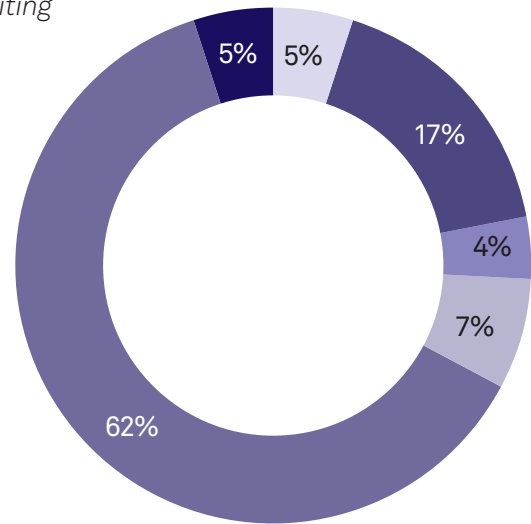
Writers earning more than £30,000 in 2018 from their writing



- Don't identify/class-less
- Working class
- Working/middle class
- Lower middle class
- Middle class
- Upper middle class

2.e Top earnings for writers – by self-identified social class

Writers earning more than £30,000 in 2018 outside their writing

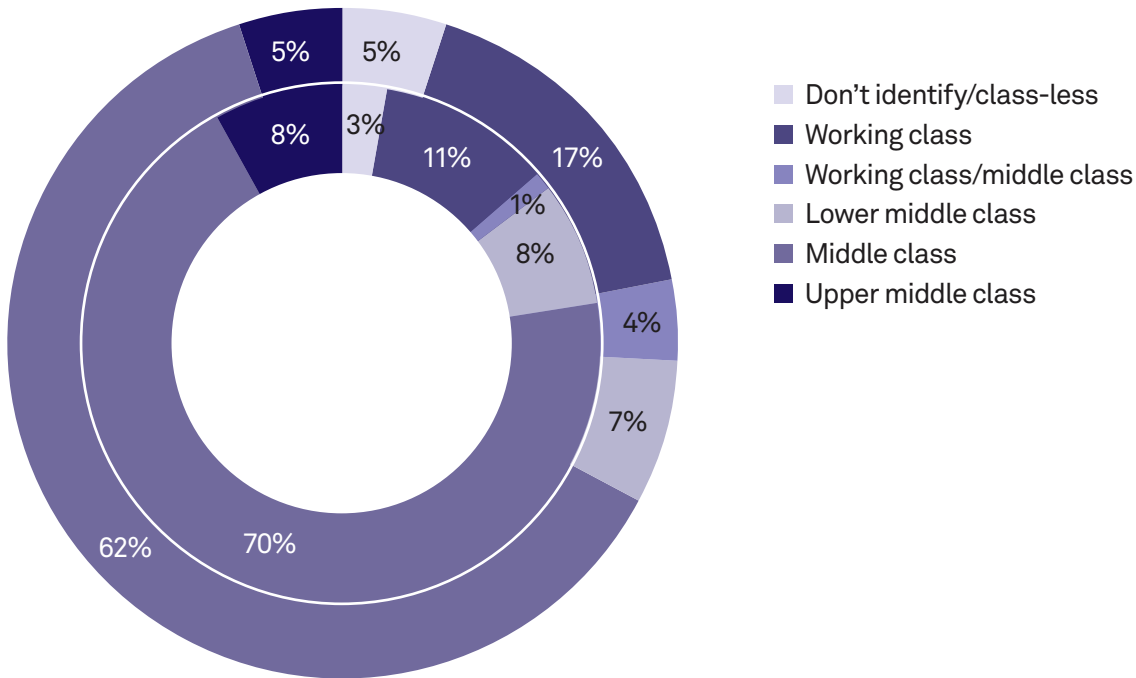


- Don't identify/class-less
- Working class
- Working/middle class
- Lower middle class
- Middle class
- Upper middle class

¹ Respondents were asked to tell us the term that best represents their social class identity. These were grouped according to recurring terms. More information about respondents' social class identities is detailed in the appendix.

2.f Top earnings for writers – by self-identified social class

Writers earning more than £30,000 from their writing (inner) and outside their writing (outer) in 2018



“I never contemplated a career in writing, I assumed I could not afford one - I couldn't afford the precarity of it, emotionally and practically. For this reason I went into another career entirely and painfully missed having writing as part of my life. When I returned to it my confidence was gone, and I felt I'd never 'catch-up' with people who had middle class security and had been given confidence to pursue their dream without risk of being poor.”

“Coming from a working class background I chose a career where I would be able to get a job and support myself and my family in the future. I didn't know about writing as a career or the options available.”

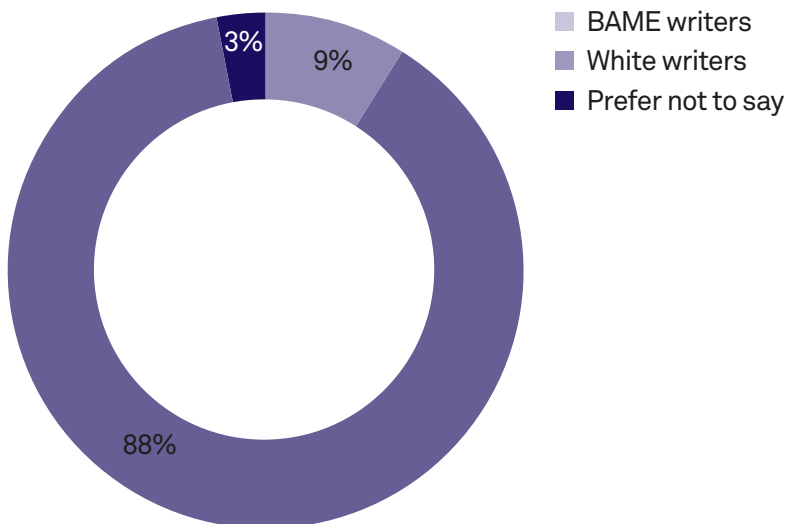
“I am from a working class background and never had any money. Earning an income from writing seemed impossible and so writing seemed impossible, without the time or space to be able to do it.”

Similarly, being from a BAME background had a disproportionately negative impact on earnings from writing, and BAME writers were more likely to earn the highest incomes in work outside writing than through their writing itself –

- **13% of all respondents identified as being from BAME backgrounds, but made up only 9% of the highest earners from writing** (earning over £30,000 from writing in 2018)
- 9% of those earning the most from writing identified as being from **BAME backgrounds**, but they were **14% of the highest earners outside writing** (earning over £30,000 from means other than writing)

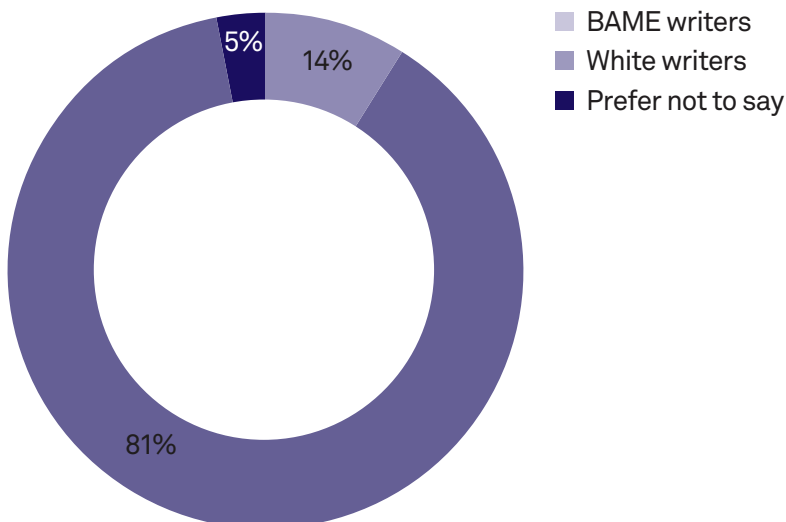
2.g Top earnings for writers – by ethnicity

Writers earning more than £30,000 from their writing in 2018



2.h Top earnings for writers – by ethnicity

Writers earning more than £30,000 outside their writing in 2018

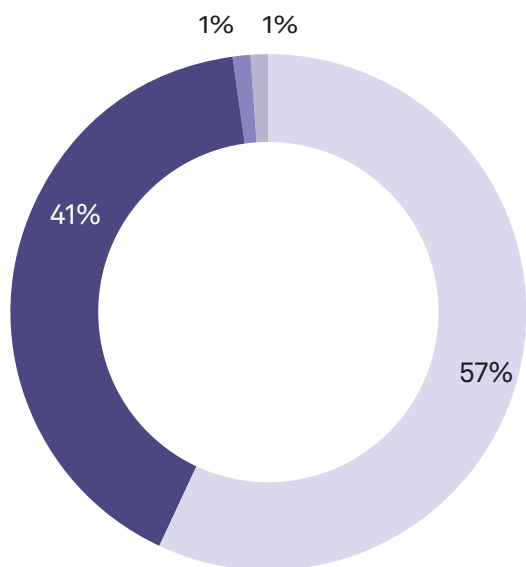


Again, respondents who identified as female were more likely to earn the highest incomes in work outside writing than through their writing –

- **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
- 57% of those earning most from their writing identified as **female**, but they made up **64% of the highest earners outside writing** (earning over £30,000 from means other than writing); in comparison, respondents identifying as male were 41% of top earners from their writing, and 33% of top earners outside writing

2.i Top earnings for writers – by gender

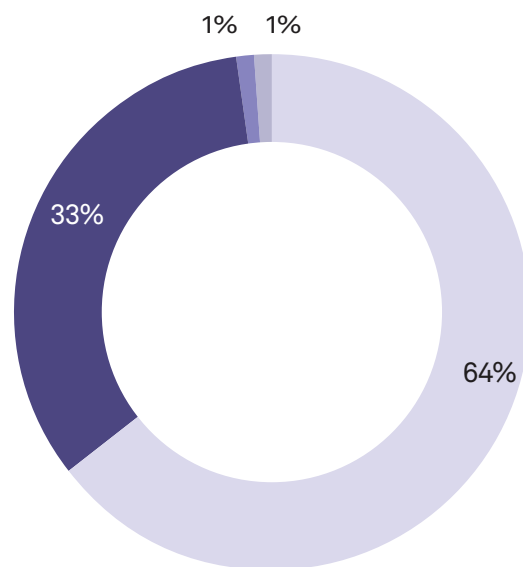
Writers earning more than £30,000 in 2018 from their writing



- Female
- Male
- In another way
- Prefer not to say

2.j Top earnings for writers – by gender

Writers earning more than £30,000 in 2018 outside their writing



- Female
- Male
- In another way
- Prefer not to say

A writer's **geographic location has an impact on their earnings**, with respondents in the South of England and London taking over half of top earnings from their writing (66% combined), and respondents from each other geographic region making up 10% or less of those who earned over £30,000.

Beyond the top earners, overall, respondents in the South of England and East of England earned the most from their writing – 19% of each earned £10,000 or more in 2018 – and writers in London came close behind (18% earned £10,000 or more in 2018).

The writers who reported earning the least were:

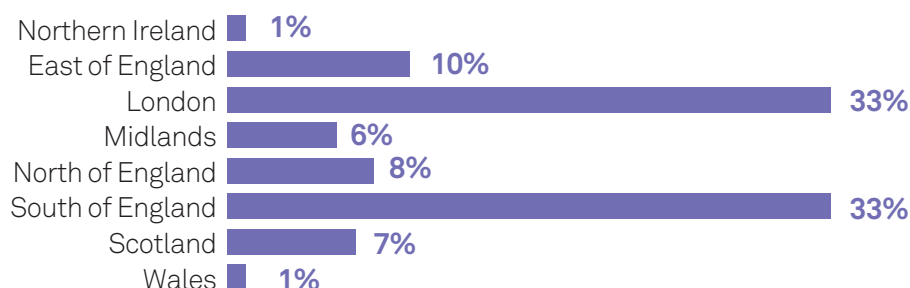
- 13% of writers in the North of England earned £10,000 or more from their writing
- 13% of writers in Wales earned £10,000 or more from their writing
- 12% of writers in Northern Ireland earned £10,000 or more from their writing²

The writers earning the most outside their writing lived in London: almost half (42%) of those who earned over £30,000 lived in London, and almost a quarter (24%) in the South of England.

Respondents from each other geographic region made up less than 10% of top earners. Higher earnings in London is an overall trend as found in the Office of National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings in 2018.

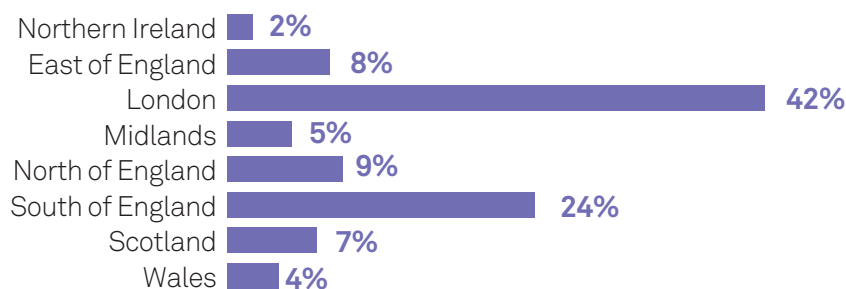
2.k Top earnings for writers – by geographic region

Writers earning more than £30,000 in 2018 from their writing



2.l Top earnings for writers – by geographic region

Writers earning more than £30,000 in 2018 outside their writing



² Results indicative due to sample size.

Financial support beyond writing

Respondents told us about the financial support or funding they receive outside their writing income, beyond employment. Of all respondents –

- 17% received financial support from family or friends
- 11% receive UK state benefits
- 9% have independent wealth

“I am a full-time author but my wife has full-time paid employment. I could not support our family alone.”

“Early in my career, I was able to *just* scrape by with a well-paying part-time job, and with support from family. Later in my career, I’m again *just* able to get by with part-time employment, a small amount of commissioning fees/royalties, and with support from my partner who is in more stable employment and also benefits from a family inheritance. Without all these things, I would not be able to have a career in writing.”

What practical support do writers receive?

More than half of respondents across the UK have received some form of **training, professional advice or workshop** from an organisation that supports writers. On average, 59% of writers have received support at some point in their careers.

More respondents from Northern Ireland (65%), Wales (63%) and Scotland (61%) have received these kinds of support than writers from anywhere else in the UK.

The three most common sources of professional support for all respondents were literary agents (20%), publishers (18%) and writer development organisations (17%). Other sources of professional support writers noted included residential writing courses and universities.

The respondents who received the most professional support were those who earned between £5,000 and £15,000 from their writing in 2018 (69%). The **greatest disparity between groups of writers is in relation to self-identified social class** –

- 49% of respondents who identified as working class received any professional support
- 62% of respondents who identified as middle class received any professional support

Writer development organisations supported the greatest range of writers, from the beginnings of their careers and across the UK. They also particularly supported writers who **primarily write poetry or for theatre or film, and writers with a disability or long-term health condition**. The greatest proportion of writers from these groups identified writer development organisations as a source of professional support.

- 23% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition had received advice, training or a workshop from a writer development organisation, compared to 16% of those without a disability or long-term health condition
- 27% of poets and 23% of writers for theatre and film had received support from writer development organisations, compared to 9% of non-fiction writers, and 11% of broadcast media writers

3. The challenges a writer faces

What barriers do writers experience to their early writing careers?

Key findings

- The most commonly cited challenges to a writer's early life were lack of financial income or expectation of it in the future (68%), lack of time to write (67%), lack of confidence in their ability (54%), and lack of information about financial support available to writers (53%)
- Writers who identified as female, from BAME backgrounds, or had a disability or long-term health condition were more likely to report lack of income as a challenge to their early careers
- 22% of respondents experienced discrimination, and 24% geographic isolation, as a challenge when beginning a career in writing

Across all respondents, the main challenges in beginning a career in writing were **lack of money, lack of time to write, lack of confidence in their ability** and the **lack of information about financial support** available to them.

While the majority of writers experience these challenges to their early careers, a writer's background, experience or identity impacts the challenges they experience. Of the main challenges a writer faces –

Lack of income or expectation of it: 68% of all respondents

The respondents who experienced the greatest impact were –

- 70% of women (compared to 59% of men)³
- 76% of BAME writers (compared to 67% of white writers)
- 74% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (compared to 67% of writers without a disability or long-term health condition)

“It is really hard to keep writing when you are not sure you can pay your rent next month.”

“The financial precarity is huge. Even with one award-winning novel published successfully and translated into 10 languages, I am not earning a reliable income and the psychological impact this has on me is significant. It is hard to feel relaxed or confident when you don't know if all your hard work will even be able to cover your living expenses.”

³This pattern is reflected in respondents who identified their gender differently to female or male, with most identifying lack of income as a challenge to their early careers. As these respondents – those who identify their gender in another way and felt lack of income was a challenge – account for a significantly smaller proportion of total respondents, this pattern cannot be statistically reported due to the margin of error.

Lack of time: 67% of all respondents

While more than half of writers found lack of time a challenge, those from BAME backgrounds were more likely than white writers to be in full-time employment, and therefore to have greater limits on their time to write.

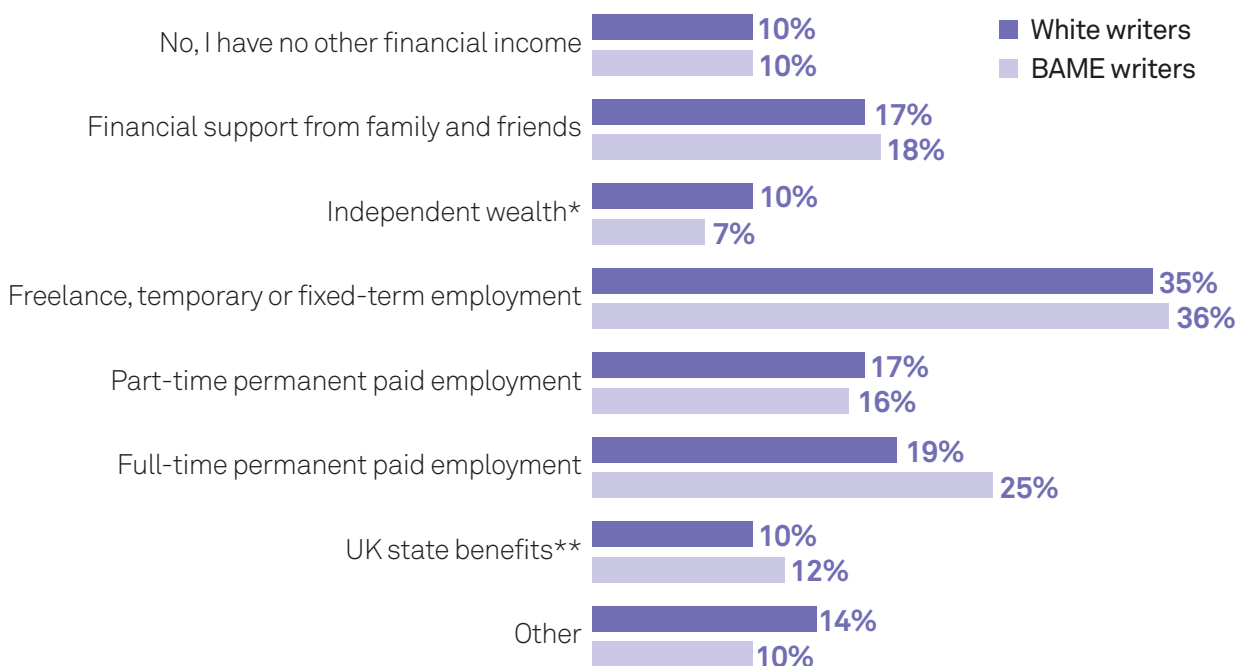
- 25% of respondents from BAME backgrounds are in full-time employment, compared to 19% of white writers

Writers from BAME backgrounds in full-time employment told us how this challenge was significant at the beginnings of their careers –

“Working full-time and therefore using a lot of mental energy means that the little time I do have available to write isn’t enough to make solid progress... With my need to support myself through full-time employment and need for balance, I have little time in which to generate, test, nurture, develop and redraft my stories.”

“With all the pressures of my job and earning a living, it was difficult to find the time to write. Looking back, I wish I had had encouragement, support (both financial and emotional) as well as some insight into the literary world and its possibilities.”

3.a Writers’ earnings outside writing – analysed by ethnicity (BAME writers compared with white writers)



*including inherited; not from current employment

**e.g Universal Credit/Child Tax Credit/Jobseeker’s Allowance etc.

Lack of confidence: 54% of all respondents

Respondents who identified as female were significantly more likely than those who identified as male to find lack of confidence a challenge to their early careers –

- 59% of women (compared to 39% of men)

Women told us about the impact lack of confidence made on their writing –

“My lack of confidence makes it difficult to pursue support, feedback and writing opportunities. It also makes it difficult to find the motivation and resilience to overcome the other challenges I face.”

“Although I’m full-time employed and often tired after work, I feel it is possible to make time to write a few lines a day, or all day Saturday, but what holds me back is lack of confidence because I can see the imperfections in my writing.”

“As a working class writer, I never believed my writing was good enough. This lack of confidence is certainly not something I’ve seen from my privately-educated peers.”

“I felt that people like me didn’t become writers.”

Lack of information about financial support available to writers: 53% of all respondents

The respondents worst affected by this challenge were –

- 66% of BAME writers (52% of white writers)
- 63% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (51% of writers without a disability or long-term health condition)
- 65% of working class writers (48% of middle class writers)
- 59% of writers in the North of England (an average of 53% of all respondents across the UK)

“Information is privilege. It is power. When I was starting out, I thought it was a closed industry, which all those years ago it probably was. I saw it as an elitist, upper middle class white, privately-educated, ex-Oxbridge world, riddled with nepotism, condescension for the other and hushed deals behind wood-panel doors. The only people of colour I saw in that world were rich emigrés, never first-generation Brits like me and they were only ever writers - never in publishing. I came from a state-educated, working class area with no links to the media world and I collected every information source about routes in, incrementally.”

“The industry is very closed in general, and the information about how or when to do something is very scarce.”

What other challenges do writers face?

Discrimination, or the fear of discrimination, was a challenge to the early careers of 22% of the overall respondents. Writers from particular backgrounds were more likely to experience discrimination as a challenge –

- 48% of BAME writers (18% of white writers)
- 49% of writers who identify their gender in a way other than male or female (25% of women; 11% of men)
- 37% of working class writers (15% middle class writers)
- 35% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (19% of writers without a disability or long-term health condition)
- 31% of LGBTQ+ writers (19% of heterosexual/straight writers)

The writers who told us that discrimination was the greatest challenge to their early careers told us more about their experiences –

“Theatre is overwhelmingly middle class, yet class is the one area not discussed in terms of diversity. It typically means working class artists cannot pursue a creative path until later in life - when most schemes and programmes are closed to them because of age discrimination.”

“I am a female BME writer. I’m British born but of Pakistani Muslim heritage. I wear a headscarf. I have encountered barriers and obstacles at every turn of my journey to publication. I don’t think I ‘fit in’ (not that that has put me off) and I feel there is definite prejudice against someone from my background. I’m constantly having to prove myself.”

“As an Indian female I found my submissions were hindered by my name. I now use a pen name.”

“As a working class writer I was told no one was interested in a working class protagonist - that literature was by and for the middle classes.... lack of connections and confidence didn’t help.”

“Fewer opportunities and lower pay for women of colour, always. Lower advances, less likelihood of commissions, reviews, everything. Less opportunity to grow and build your career and build up a body of work.”

The **lack of successful writers of a similar background** was a challenge to 25% of the respondents overall, and 51% of those who identified discrimination as a challenge. The lack of successful writers with a similar background was a particular challenge to –

- 44% of working class writers (15% of middle class writers)
- 51% of BAME writers (21% of white writers)

“I’m a first generation immigrant to the UK. I’ve published one novel in this country but I still feel out of place and isolated in the literary scene. It appears that everyone knows everyone else.”

“As a mixed race Indian/English writer applying for writing support from organisations encouraging BAME writers, I have been refused because my work didn’t contain enough ‘Indian issues’. I want to be able to increase representation so I can write Indian characters without their race being the central issue of the story. Those are the stories I’ve always wanted to read.”

“If you don’t see people like you (working class disabled) on book shelves, how do you know it’s possible?”

“Coming from the Scottish working class (and being a female) meant that poetry and fiction would have been seen as ridiculous aspirations. At the time I began writing, women were only just beginning to be visible, mainly through the small-, self- or feminist publishing houses. I was part of this breakthrough generation, but have always been conscious of the class divide, in terms of family background, income, contacts, and the overwhelmingly middle to upper class mores of the publishing ‘industry’.”

“I had no one who was similar to me, nor who understood me or where I was coming from.”

“Being told by agents they already have another Asian woman as though only 1 per agency is enough.”

“There was a complete sense of isolation in knowing no one doing the same thing.”

Geographic isolation was a challenge to 24% of all respondents. It had the greatest impact on writers from particular areas and demographic backgrounds –

- 55% of writers in Northern Ireland; 43% of writers in the North of England; 35% of writers in Wales
- 36% of writers who identified as working class (20% of writers who identified as middle class)
- 35% of writers with a disability or long-term health condition (22% of those who don't)
- 34% of the youngest writers, aged 16 to 24 (19% of those aged 65 to 74, and 8% of those aged over 75)

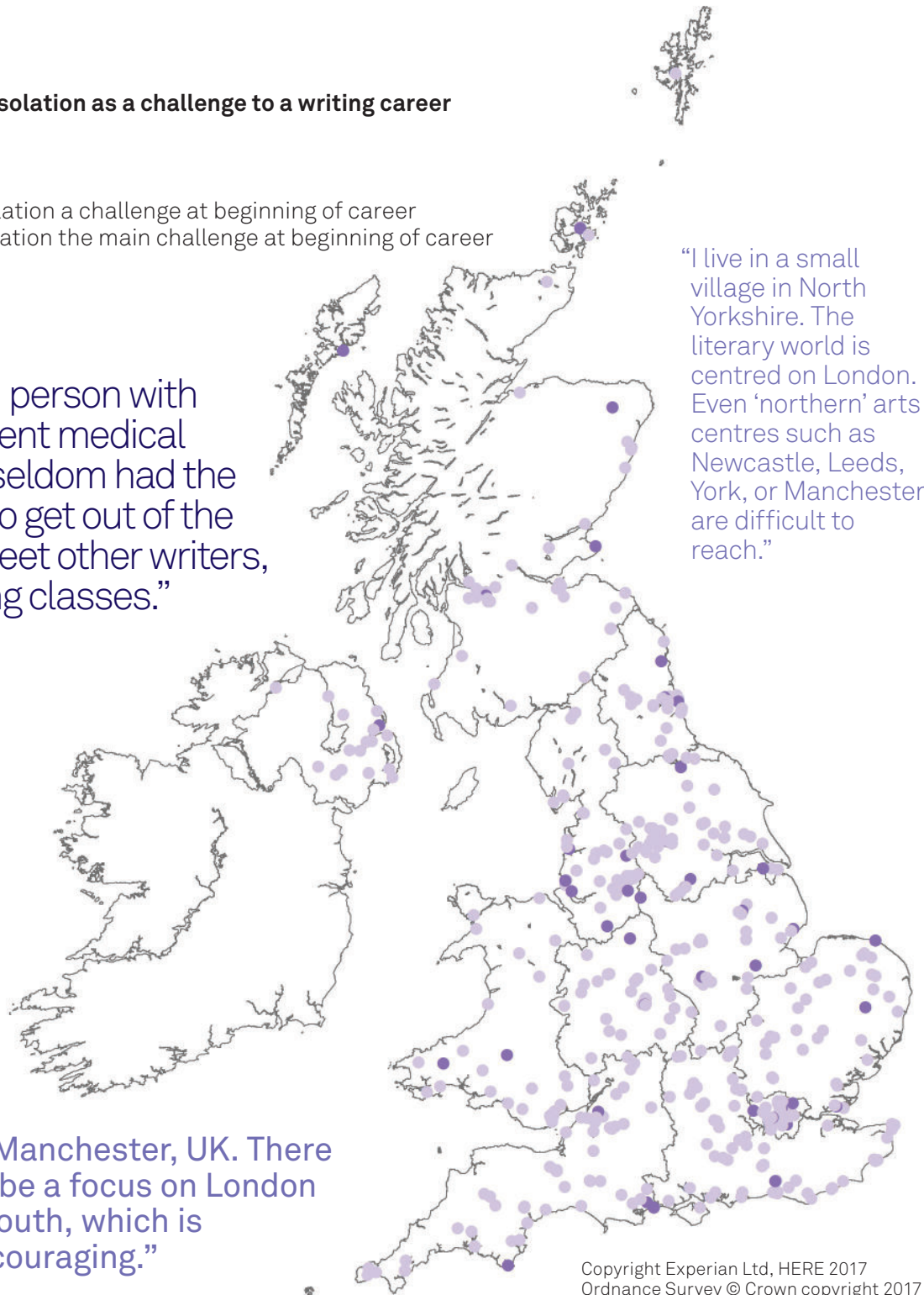
3.b Geographic isolation as a challenge to a writing career

- Geographic isolation a challenge at beginning of career
- Geographic isolation the main challenge at beginning of career

“As a disabled person with several different medical conditions, I seldom had the opportunity to get out of the house and meet other writers, or go to writing classes.”

“I live in a small village in North Yorkshire. The literary world is centred on London. Even ‘northern’ arts centres such as Newcastle, Leeds, York, or Manchester are difficult to reach.”

“Based in Manchester, UK. There seems to be a focus on London and the South, which is really discouraging.”



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What would writers change in their careers?

We asked writers the one thing they would change about their writing careers. The most cited changes were –

- **the time they have to write** (26% of respondents who agreed for their quotes to be used), particularly by reducing the time they spend in other paid employment
- **the income they receive** (24% of respondents who agreed for their quotes to be used)

Many writers particularly identified increased advances and profit sharing from publishers. This is in line with recent discussion – led particularly by the Society of Authors⁴ – of the writer’s and publisher’s share of profits in the books industry. The respondents told us the changes they wanted –

“Decent income and royalties paid on time. Everyone but the writer gets a salary.”

“Having a decent income to allow me to work full time. Advances are poor, as are royalty rates.”

“Improved royalties and advances would give me a dignified income.”

A number of writers also suggested the introduction of a minimum wage for writers. While the proposed salary ranged in responses – from £10,000 to £17,000 – writers suggested that a guaranteed minimum income, with bonuses related to the higher profits of top-selling books, would make their writing lives more sustainable. For many, this would offset the pressures of financial and practical responsibilities, including caring for dependents and low-paid employment outside writing. Some writers believed this should be adopted within the industry; others that government support for writers should be introduced in this manner –

“I wish I had a guaranteed minimum income! It is very hard to plan a writing career. So much is dependent on commercial success, quickly. I received a high advance for my first novel (£55k), and a lower one for my second (£10k) because my first had not yet been released when the publisher bought it, and they had no competition for my second. It would be great if we could all be guaranteed a minimum income, and then given bonuses on top if our books did well. Rather than some books getting loads of money upfront, and others not much at all.”

“A slightly higher income from writing i.e. at least minimum wage level of £17,000 pa. I currently write full-time having got a very good book deal for two novels. However spread over the 5-6 years of writing those books, and planning the next (not under contract), and adding in some income from events (not including the many events which do not pay at all), this has still proved to be a below minimum wage salary per year for several years now.”

“An independent basic income (of about £10,000 per year) that frees me from the need to earn a living from my writing.”

“I would appreciate having support from the government in between jobs like they do in France where state benefit covers artists and writers between jobs, as the French government recognises the sometimes inconsistency of the creative industries...there must be more grants made available to writers who are struggling due to socio-economic reasons explicitly aimed at those on low income/experiencing hardship. This must be recognised and addressed, especially in relation to the current situation in Britain.”

“I would like more time to write and a guarantee of an income.”

⁴In 2018, *The Bookseller* published an article from Society of Authors Chief Executive Nicola Solomon, quoting “Figures from Nielsen BookScan, compiled by *The Bookseller*, show 5,093 authors had sales (not income, of course) more than £10,000 in 2017. Collectively, those authors accounted for 56% of the £1.59bn total books sold. So a big proportion of sales—44%, or £699m—came from authors with sub-five-figure sales.” Solomon argued for a wider distribution of profits to writers. *The Bookseller* also published an article from Andrew Franklin, founder and Managing Director of Profile Books, identifying the financial pressures publishers face, of rising fixed and variable costs, and the risk to publishers of incurring losses and becoming insolvent. (*The Bookseller*, 2 March 2018)

4. The words that sustain a writer

Key finding

- **The pieces of advice that most encourage a writer are to persist in the face of rejection, and that their voices are important**

We know from the findings of this survey that peer support and emotional support are significant to a majority of writers.

We asked respondents who had been writing for more than five years the **one piece of advice that encouraged them to pursue a writing career** when they started. We also asked respondents who have been writing for fewer than five years for the **piece of advice that keeps them writing now**.

The responses to both were strikingly similar. A common theme was perseverance, with Samuel Beckett's famous line "Try again. Fail again. Fail better" quoted by several writers. Many writers follow the advice to write every day. Writers also told us that the idea they are the only ones who can tell their story, and that their voices are important, encourages them to begin a career in writing, and to keep going.

Writers quoted by respondents included:

- David Almond
- Maya Angelou
- J.G. Ballard
- Samuel Beckett
- Bernard Cornwell
- Carlos Fuentes
- Neil Gaiman
- Seamus Heaney
- Ernest Hemingway
- Michael Morpurgo
- Máirtín Ó Direáin
- Frank O'Hara
- Toni Morrison
- Sylvia Plath
- Marcel Proust
- J K Rowling
- George Bernard Shaw
- Zadie Smith
- Rabindranath Tagore
- Virginia Woolf

Many writers who have been pursuing a career for more than five years told us that encouragement from publishers and agents was vital to their earlier writing lives, as well as public funding, and encouragement from teachers and writers visiting schools.

"A publisher rejected my manuscript but took the trouble to write that I had a wonderful, warm and eminently readable writing style."

"My primary school teacher encouraged me to send some of my writing off to a publisher. I still have the letter from Pan Books saying my writing "showed real promise."

"Gillian Clarke running a workshop in my school."

"An award from the Arts Council for an early attempt at full-length fiction was my main encouragement."

Quotes are given verbatim. Where writers are quoted by respondents, quotes are given here as written in the survey responses and not verified.

Pursuing a career for up to five years
The importance of the writer's voice

"I have a story to tell."
"I can tell stories no one else can from the viewpoint no one else might."
"I have something to say and a big imagination."
"I have something to say, and I'm the only one who can say it my own way."
"I have something valid to say."
"I've got a story to tell and lessons to share."
"Just the fact that only I can tell my story."
"Only I can tell my stories the way I want them to be."
"Only I can write my stories."
"Only you can write the works you write: each voice is unique."
"Only you can write this story."
"That my voice matters."
"You have a story to tell."
"You have a voice."
"You have something to say."
"Your voice deserves to be heard."
"Your voice is important and needs to be heard."
"Your voice is necessary."

Writers quoted:

"Probably Beckett: Try Again. Fail again. Fail better."
"Bernard Cornwell: the art of writing is to re-write and re-write until you have made it the best you can."
"Start telling the stories that only you can tell, because there'll always be better writers than you and there'll always be smarter writes than you... but you are the only you.' Neil Gaiman"
"Leave the world more interesting for your being here. Make good art.' Neil Gaiman"
"Neil Gaiman said 'Keep putting one word after another.'"
"Ernest Hemingway's notion of emptying the 'well' of ideas for the day, then stopping to let it fill up for the next day."
"Teachers should be encouraging kids to look out of their classroom windows and daydream.
Michael Morpurgo"
"If there's a book you want to read that isn't on the shelves, then write it yourself. (Toni Morrison)"
"Toni Morrison said something like 'There's no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.'"
"Go on your nerve' from Frank O'Hara keeps me writing."
"And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.' Sylvia Plath"

“Always keep a little patch of blue sky in your life.’ (Proust)”

“Never to give up-advice from JK Rowling!”

“Readers read primarily to feel less alone (I’m paraphrasing Zadie Smith).”

Pursuing a career for more than five years
The importance of the writer’s voice

“That I had a unique perspective that was worth sharing – even if it was difficult to do so.”

“That I had a voice.”

“That I had talent and should pursue it.”

“That I have a voice and should continue.”

“That if I didn’t get my words out into the world my stories would never be told.”

“You have a voice.”

Writers quoted:

“That a writer’s most important skill is to finish what they start writing. David Almond”

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.’ Maya Angelou”

“Stay true to your chosen obsessions’: JG Ballard”

“Writing is a struggle against silence. Carlos Fuentes”

“Seamus Heaney’s advice that the key was ‘getting started, keeping going, getting started again’, with the emphasis on ‘getting started again.’”

“Keep alight the coal of your vision / To part with it is the death of you.’ (a translation from the Irish of Máirtín Ó Direáin)”

“If you find it difficult to copy another’s work - without using your own words - then you have a style.’ George Bernard Shaw”

“If I were to give advice to a young person now, I would quote Rabindranath Tagore: ‘I have spent my days / stringing and unstringing my instrument / while the song I came to sing remains unsung.’ Don’t let that be you!”

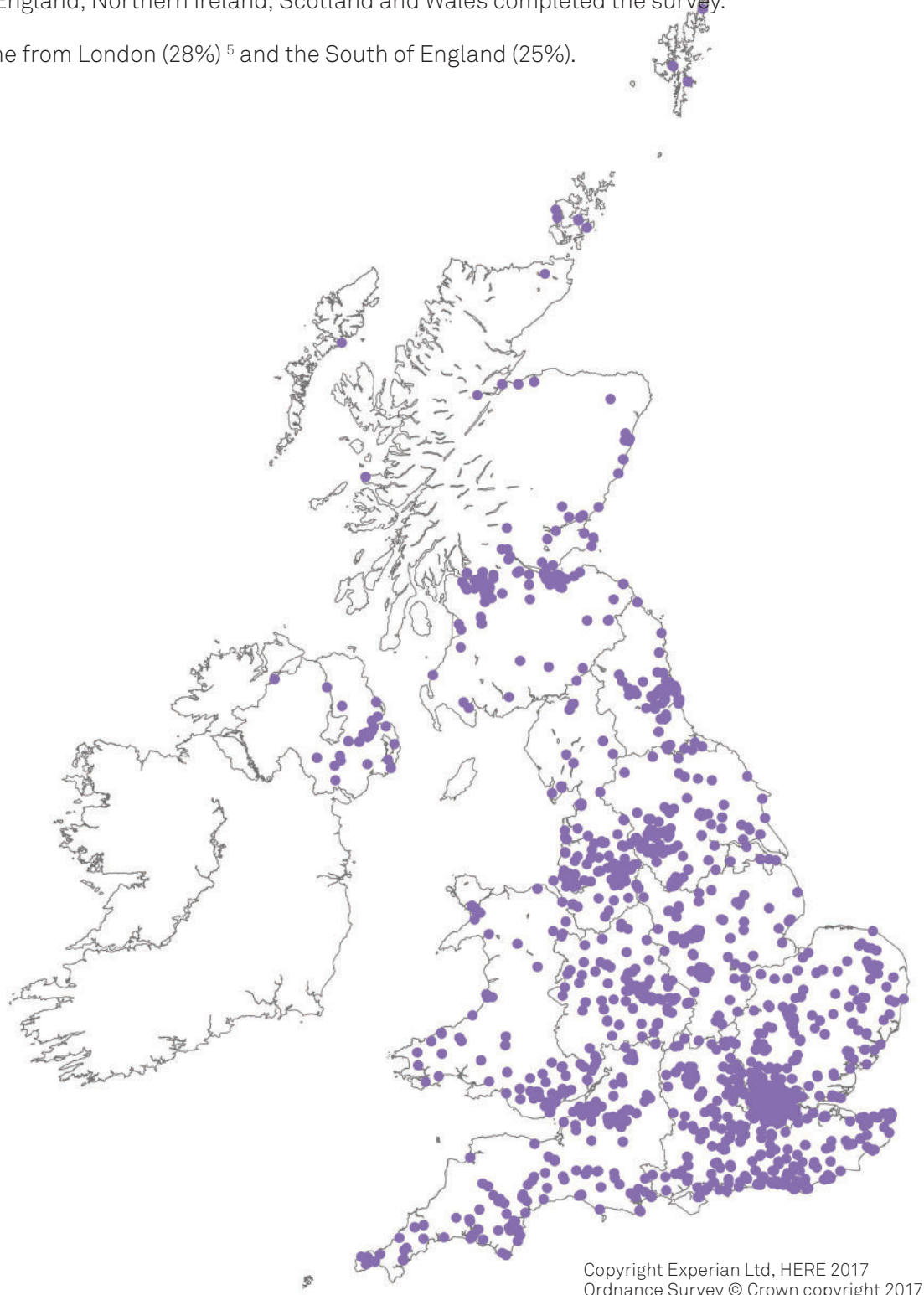
“Find a room of your own! (V. Woolf)”

Appendix: UK writers 2019

I. Where writers live

Writers from across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales completed the survey.

Many responses came from London (28%)⁵ and the South of England (25%).

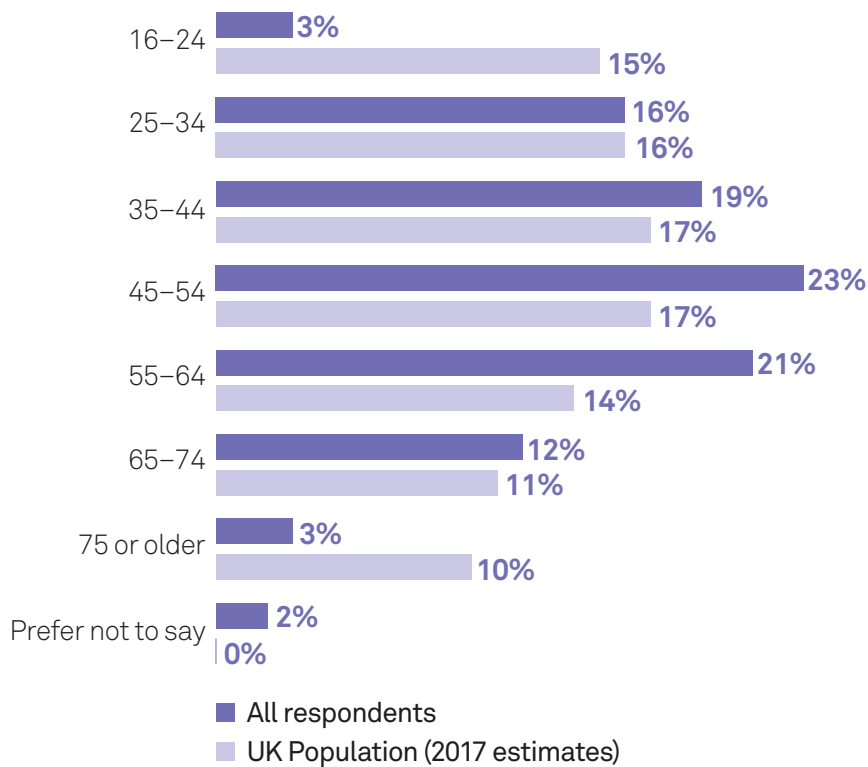


⁵58% (673 of 1,167) of the respondents to *The Bookseller's* class survey lived in London; the London-centric nature of publishing was raised as a concern throughout their class survey responses.

II. The ages of writers

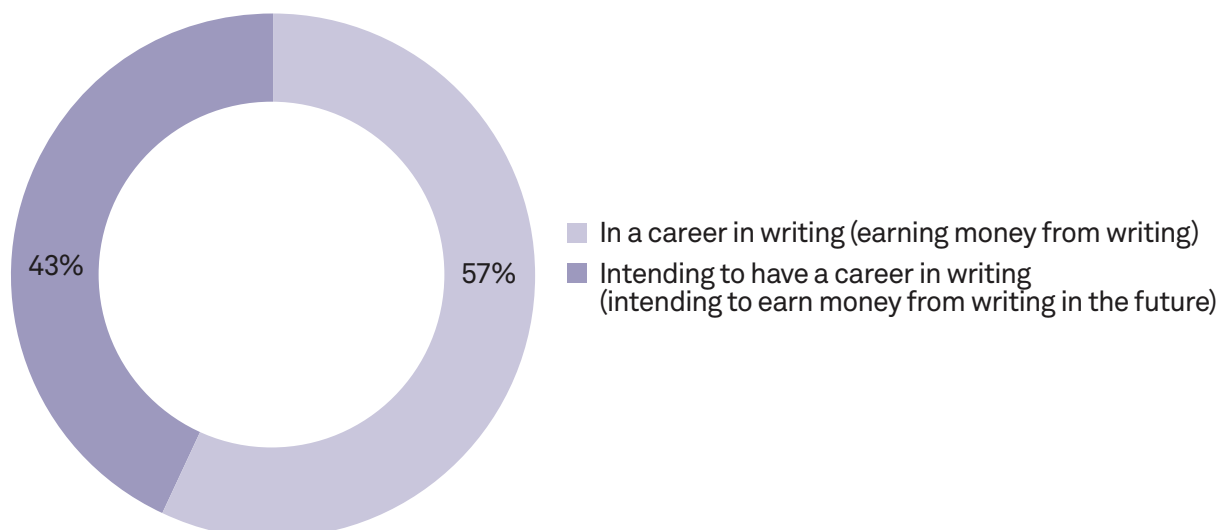
Respondents were aged from 16 to over 75.

- 63% were between the ages of 35 and 64



III. In a career or intending a career in writing

- 57% were in a career in writing (earning money from writing)
- 43% were intending to have a career in writing (intending to earn money from it in the future)



IV. Writers' employment outside writing

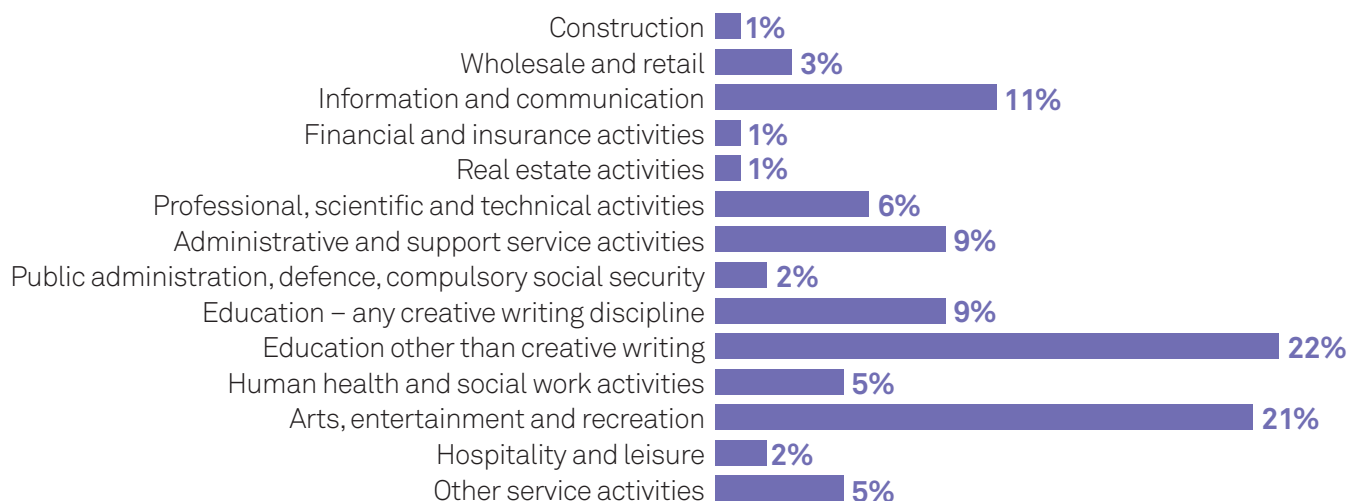
The most common industries for a writer's employment outside of writing were –

- 31% in education
- 21% arts, entertainment and recreation

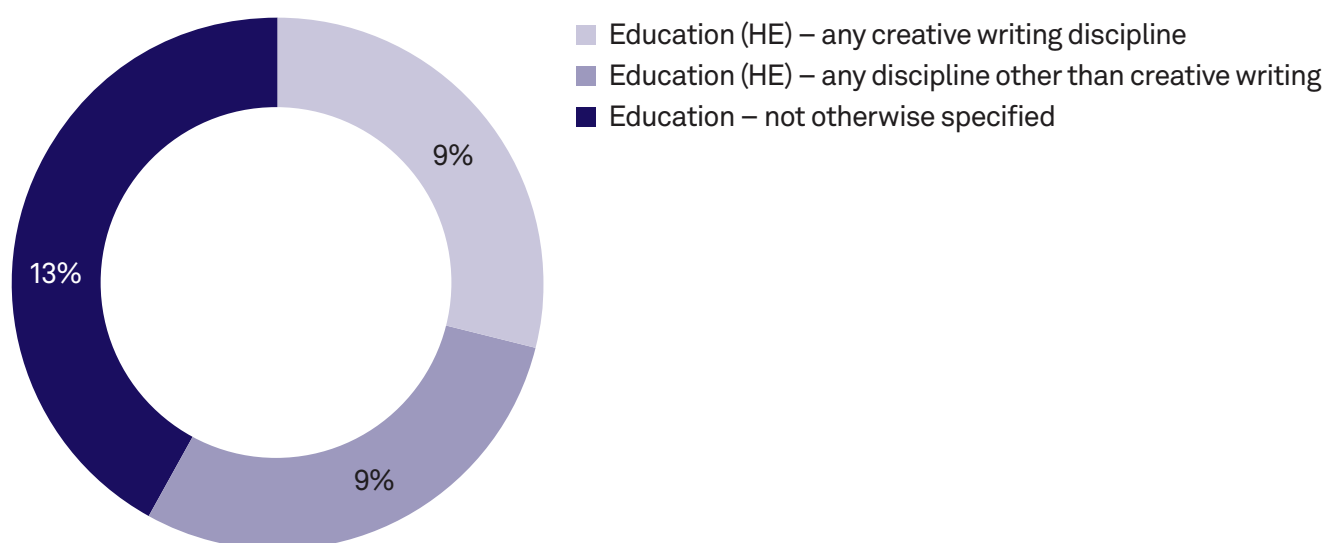
While there has been rapid expansion in creative writing as a discipline in Higher Education (HE)⁶, as many writers are employed in HE in disciplines outside of creative writing programmes as in them (9% of each).

In the graph below, all employment categories selected by a minimum of 1% of the respondents are shown.

IV.a Writers' employment beyond writing



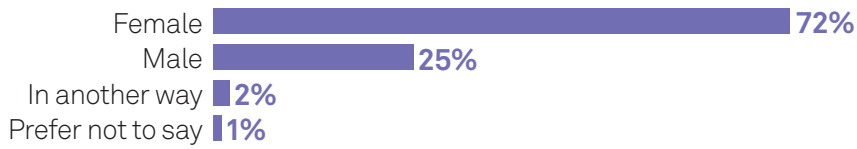
IV.b Writers working in education



⁶In ten years between 2003 and 2013, the number of UK Higher Education Institutions offering BA courses in Creative Writing rose from 24 to 83; the number of MA courses rose from 21 to 200; the number of PhD programmes from 19 to more than 50 (Paul Munden's report for The Higher Education Academy, 'Beyond The Benchmark', 2013).

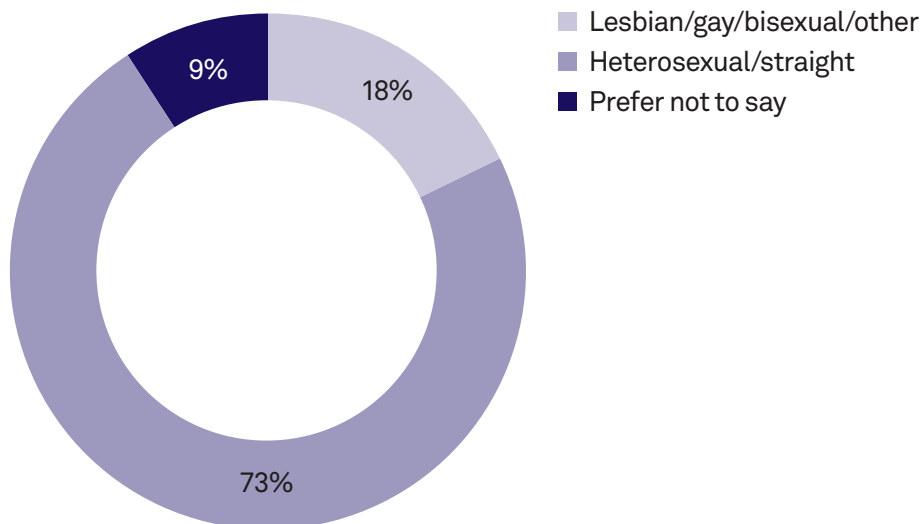
V. Gender

- 72% identified as female
- 25% identified as male
- 2% identified in a way other than male or female (including non-binary or in another way)
- 1% preferred not to say



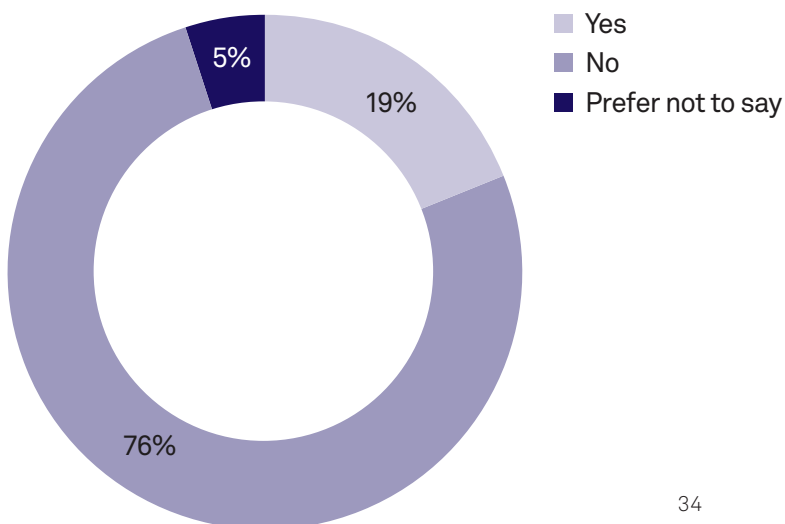
VI. Sexuality

- 73% identified as heterosexual or straight
- 18% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or in another way
- 9% preferred not to say



VII. Disability

- 19% identified as a D/deaf or disabled person, or had a long-term health condition
- 76% did not identify in this way
- 5% preferred not to say



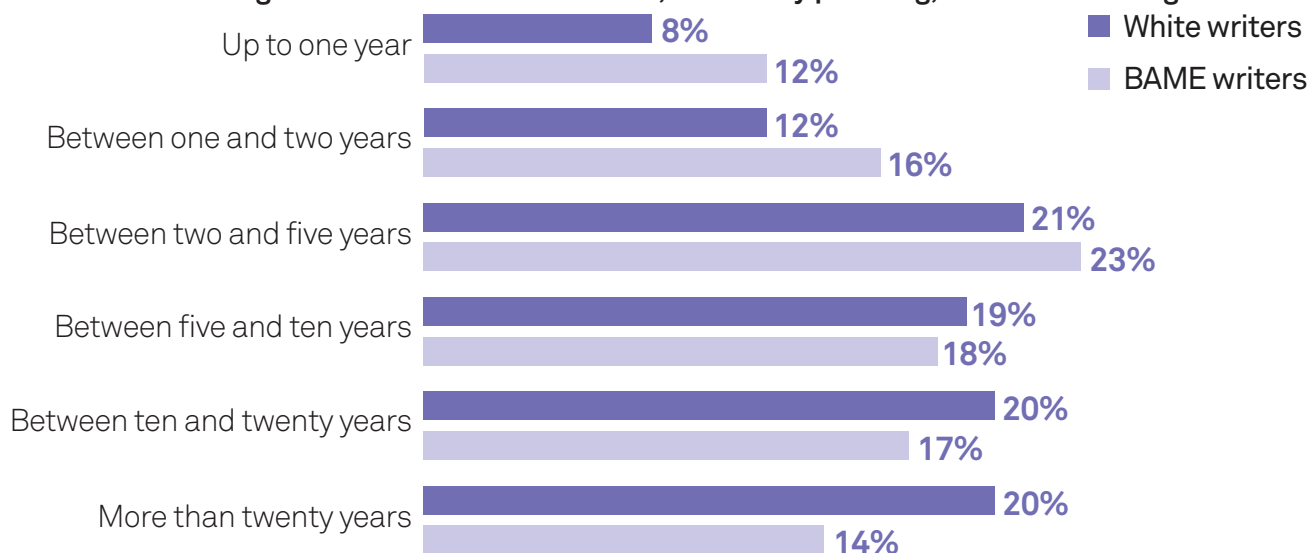
VIII. Ethnicity

- 13% of writers who responded to the survey came from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (13% of UK population in 2017 estimates)

Throughout this report we have explored the particular experiences reported by BAME writers, following a number of reports in recent years that have found barriers to BAME writers pursuing a career in writing. Pertinent findings of these include –

- 73% of respondents to the Arts Council England survey into literary fiction responded that there was a particular issue with the representation of BAME voices in literary fiction (Arts Council England’s ‘Literature in the 21st Century: Understanding Models of Support for Literary Fiction’ report, 2017)
- 56% of publishers surveyed said that UK publishing was ‘not diverse at all’ in 2015 (Spread the Word’s ‘Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the UK Marketplace’, 2015)
- In 2014, only 4% of writers at UK literature festivals were BAME writers working in the UK (Spread the Word’s ‘Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the UK Marketplace’, 2015)

VIII.a The length of time a writer has been in, or actively pursuing, a career in writing



VIII.b Geographic regions of writers



IX. Social class identity

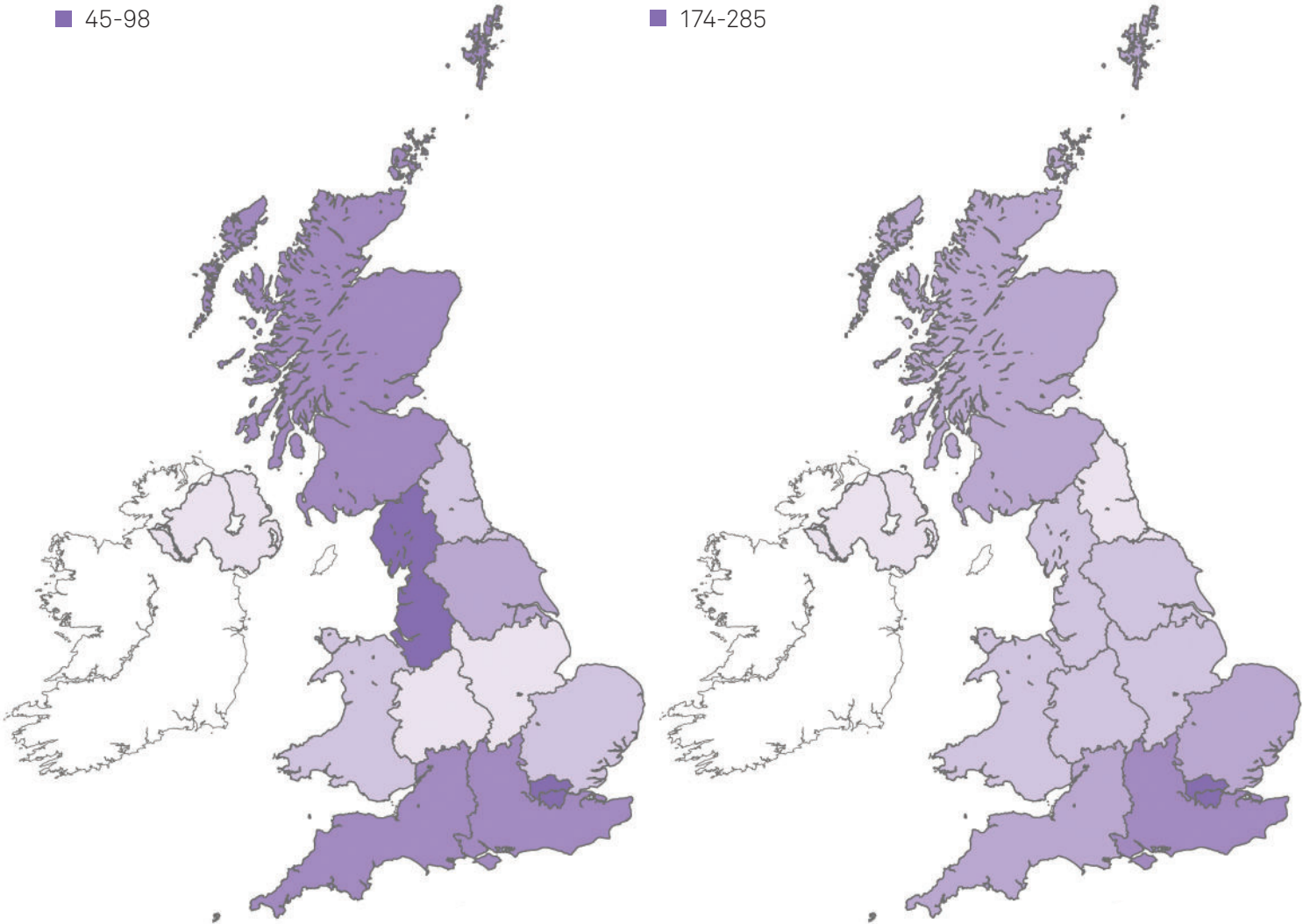
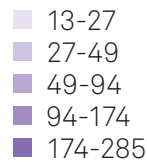
- 54% of the writers identified as middle class; 25% identified as working class
- A higher proportion of writers in the North of England (40%), Wales (38%), and Scotland (30%) identify as working class than in any other geographic area.

IX.a Geographic regions of writers

Working class Count by region

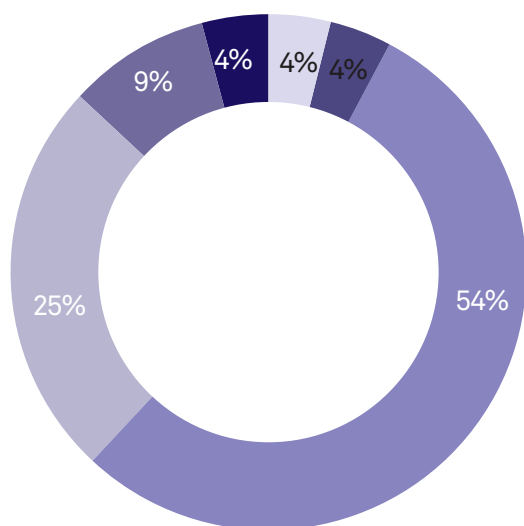


Middle class Count by region



We asked respondents to give us – in a free-text field – the term that best represents how they think of their social class identity. Where terms recurred, the responses were grouped, with the most common being ‘middle class’ (54%) and ‘working class’ (25%).

IX.b Social class identity – by terms given



- Don't identify/class-less
- Working class/middle class
- Middle class
- Working class
- Lower middle class
- Upper middle class

These findings are in line with other research that shows the underrepresentation of people from working class backgrounds in writing and in publishing –

- Analysing the 2014 Labour Force Survey, Dr Dave O'Brien (Goldsmiths, University of London) identified only 10% of writers and translators had parents employed in routine or manual labour (Dave O'Brien, Daniel Laurison, Andrew Miles, Sam Friedman, 'Are the creative industries meritocratic? An analysis of the 2014 British Labour Force Survey', Cultural Trends, 2016)
- Of the 310 writers who completed *The Bookseller* survey, 68% identified as working class – a total of 211 writers. Of the 2,166 respondents to the A Room of My Own survey, 25% identified as working class – a total of 475 writers.

We asked writers to tell us why they identified their social class in the way they had given us. Respondents who identified as working class gave a range of answers, with accent, growing up on a council estate, alienation from the publishing and media worlds (which are seen as middle class), education and the prevalence of debt or lack of financial savings (particularly during the writer's younger years) as leading reasons for their identity.

Many writers addressed the dissonance of their upbringings and backgrounds with their current positions, particularly in relation to their interaction with literature as an industry. These writers told us that – despite their changed circumstances – their upbringings continued to inform their lives and decisions.

Quotes are given verbatim.

Responses from writers who identify as working class

Question: Please let us know why you identify in this way, if possible.

“I speak with an accent that many view as common.”

“Grew up in a block of council flats. Low income. More middle class now due to degree and own house but feel working class. Still sound common!”

“I was born working class; the status remains irrespective of career choices”

“I come from a deprived area of Glasgow and grew up on a council estate although my family were skilled craftspeople. I was the first family member to attend university.”

“I’ve had three separate and successful “middle class” media careers but I still identify with my own class. More significantly, middle class people identify me as working class (if I revert to my own accent) and generally seem surprised when they find out what I’ve done for a living.”

“I grew up in Sunderland and am the first person in my family to go to university. Even in my life now, which is distant from my working-class childhood, I still feel different to middle class people and have insecurities and doubts that I believe are linked to my background. I don’t think your class background is something that ever leaves you, even if the material facts of your life change.”

“I exist on State Benefits. I come from a family of factory workers and cleaners. I am proudly working class.”

“Despite the fact I now live in London and work in a typically middle-class sector (publishing), my northern accent and my upbringing and early experiences do set me apart from friends and colleagues. In fact, my current circumstances have made me feel more working class, or at least more aware of it - I never realised what could count as being working class until I met people who had lived, and continued to live, very different lives to me.”

“I find this tricky, because our income and lifestyle are very middle class now, but I know my mindset is still working class, and it has an impact on many of the decisions I make around my writing, and the places I feel comfortable in in the literary community.”

“I grew up on a council estate and am the first in my family to go to university. I am part of a generation that was led to believe we weren’t good enough, and that self-doubt was internalised. I’ve lost my regional accent and appear middle class because of my education but I resent being pigeonholed, particularly because there are certain additional assumptions about older women.”

“I’ve worked harder than most for everything I have achieved. Many menial jobs alongside education in order to be able to afford courses. Many menial jobs alongside writing. My family are all working class. The writing world is definitely easier for those with money.”

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