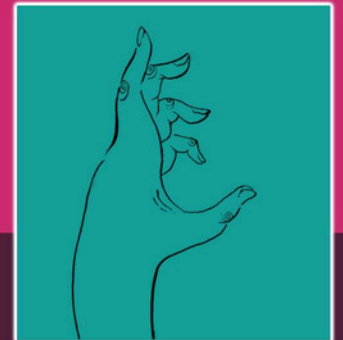
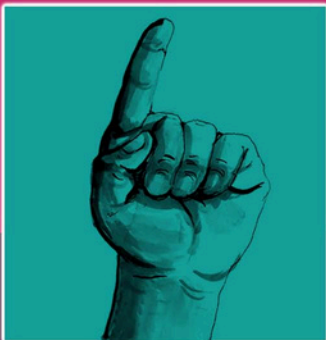
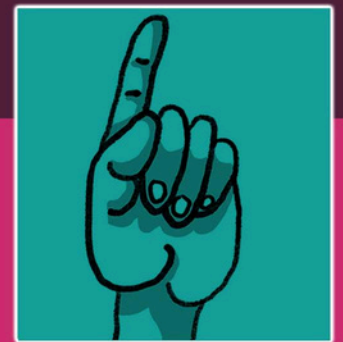
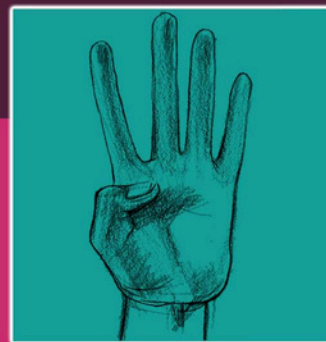
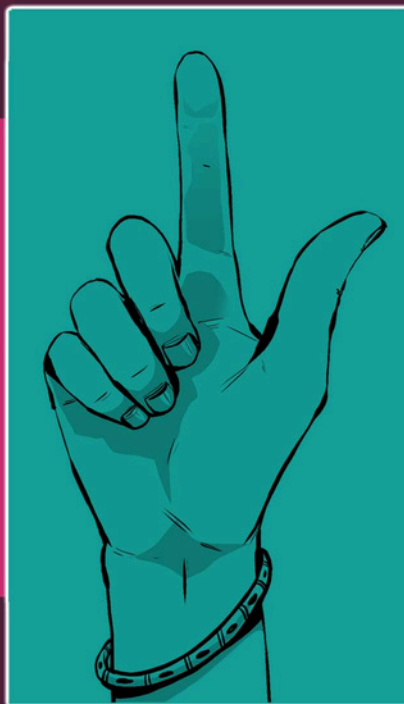


UK COMICS CREATOR SURVEY 2025

UK COMICS CREATORS RESEARCH REPORT



Joanna Rivera-Carlisle
Amanda Nicole Curtis
Hannah Berry

May 2026



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**ARTS
UNIVERSITY
BOURNEMOUTH**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Executive Summary	7
A Vocation and an Affliction	12
Ready to Report	16
Key Aims	16
Methodology	17
Demographics	18
Portrait of a Comic Artist on Fire	23
Into the Comicverse	23
Have You Made it Yet?.....	28
That’s So Niche	34
Cons for Pros	41
Universally Challenged	46
The Current Issues	52
Cost of Living Crisis	52
Infrastructure and Support	57
Brexit and International Concerns	65
Inclusivity	67
Health and Wellbeing	72
Artificial Intelligence	75
Policy Power-Ups	81
1: How to Train Your Drawing	81
2: Resourceful	82
3: Safety Nets	85
4: Platforming the UK	86
5: Con Artists	87
6: Being Well	89
7: Do It Like the French	91
Recommendations	94
Amateurs, Assemble	97
References	99

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- JRC & AC

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- HB

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FOREWORD

In my 20-odd years as a comics pro I've spent a good deal of time telling people just how great comics are. Sometimes people pay me to do this, but for the better part I do it because I want more people to have joy in their lives.

Because comics are magnificent, aren't they? They are the perfect tools for communication, for education, for connection, for creativity, for building understanding and empathy, as well as, of course, entertainment. It's a medium that is welcoming and accessible; the one at the party who fills your glass and introduces you to the people who will become your best friends.

Following the somewhat sobering findings of the 2020 UK Comics Creator Survey, some industry contacts and I co-founded the Comics Cultural Impact Collective in order to raise the profile of comics and support creators. We seek out relevant stats and research to enlighten people who seem to have accidentally underestimated comics. Stats such as: **40% of young people read comics or graphic novels at least once a month, and twice as many young people who read comics in their free time said that they enjoy reading compared with those who don't read comics¹.**

Given that we're currently experiencing a reading enjoyment crisis – one which compelled the Government to initiate the National Year of Reading campaign in order to tackle it – comics is a silver bullet, worthy of celebration. But the stakes are raised significantly when you know that: **reading for pleasure is the single most important indicator of a child's future success, regardless of their background².**

We can therefore stand up and truthfully say: **'Comics are demonstrably improving the prospects of 40% of young people in the UK. Ensuring people have continued access to comics is in the public interest'**.

And the great news – both for people who believe children should have improved prospects and people who enjoy market growth (not always the same people) – is that over the last few years comics and graphic novel sales have increased dramatically.

In 2019, one in twenty children's books sold by Waterstones was a graphic novel. By 2024, it was one in ten. 2025 saw the highest ever graphic novel sales at £78.7m: 14% higher than the previous year. Children's Comic Strip Fiction & Graphic Novels alone sold 29% more than in 2024³. I'm no economist, but that's a boom if ever I saw one.

These numbers portray a UK industry on the ascent – crampons fixed on boots; eyes fixed on the summit. Other numbers, though – specifically those in the report you’re about to read – portray a very different image. Of the creators who make their money from traditional publishing, the very sherpas lugging the industry to the peak, only 11% earned over £20,000 from their comics work in 2024–25. Despite the boom, more than 89% of these creators didn’t even earn the National Living Wage.

Comics is a precarious way to earn a living, and very few do so entirely: the vast majority of respondents supplement their comics income with other work, leaving them less time to focus on what – in an ideal world – would be their career. In fact, only one fifth of comics-career-oriented respondents earn most of their income from it.

‘But wait!’ I hear you wonder. ‘We’re a civilised society and art is a public good irrespective of commercial success and is therefore eligible for public funding!’ This is true. Sadly, despite the popular appeal of comics, only 4% of creators have received funding for their comics work from Arts Council England, 2% from Creative Scotland, and apparently none at all from the Arts Councils of Wales (or Literature Wales) and Northern Ireland.

These are difficult enough circumstances in normal times, but during a cost of living crisis they are outright hostile.

Oozing onto this bleak stage is the reanimated morass of carcasses that is Generative AI: soaking up the supplemental work upon which creators used to be able to rely. Almost a quarter of creators suspect and 12% know for a fact that the freelance illustration, copywriting and design work which used to sustain them is instead going to AI; a once-steady source of income spirited away to Silicon Valley.

The creative industries contribute an estimated £124bn to the UK economy⁴, but at the grassroots level from which it draws its talent people are forced to choose between increasingly unreliable creative careers or other sources of income, with many forced to give up their craft altogether. As access to the arts is stripped away, we have to ask ourselves who culture is for. Who gets to experience it? Who gets to make it? Who gets to see themselves reflected in the stories that are told?

Comics has always had the reputation of being a home for defiant outsiders, and this shows in the demographics: 44% of creators are neurodivergent, 62% are LGBTQ+, 25% are disabled. Also, 32% of comics creators identify as working class compared with just 16% of workers in the creative industries⁵. The comics scene is rich with voices that are routinely marginalised when it comes to cultural and social conversations – proof to anyone who truly cares about access to the arts that it is an ecosystem to be treasured.

This is an industry that needs urgent attention, and finally – amid an exciting artistic gold rush, glittering with potential for shiny new works to reach delighted new audiences – it might just receive it.

A cursory glance at more established and lucrative artforms, however – music, film and video games to name three – offers a grim vision of what can happen when creative outputs are heavily commodified. The attention switches from building the most fertile environment for artistic expression towards enabling maximum profit extraction; profits which inevitably flow away from the artists themselves. In a scene dominated by marketability, creators are sidelined while industry-wide decisions are made by the big dogs in the C-suite, hair slicked back with the spittle of Milton Friedman.

In my introduction to the last survey I noted wistfully that: ***'We don't have the production and retail infrastructures of the US; we don't have the social and cultural acceptance of France; we don't have the nation-wide readership of Japan.'***

We don't have those things...yet.

However, we also don't have creators forced to crowdfund their own healthcare as giant corporations make millions from their work, as in the US; we don't have the market saturation that requires creators to churn out low-paying books in order to make ends meet, as in France; and we don't have creators working themselves to literal death to meet punishing deadlines, as in Japan.

We don't have those things...yet.

So perhaps here, on the way to the summit, is the perfect time to think about our priorities. The growth and stability of our industry is a shared ambition, but this growth must be sustainable, and equitable, and – crucially – the creators themselves must be involved in the design. It's my hope that these findings can be used to help plot that course.

The 2020 survey was set up to help ensure that this budding artistic scene isn't snuffed out with a gust of economic pressure. This survey follows suit but with a sharper additional agenda: to allow us to have a collective voice, louder than any corporate interests, which foregrounds in black and white the needs of creators as the bedrock of a thriving UK comics industry.

Hannah Berry FRSL
Co-Director, The Comics Cultural Impact Collective
April 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

This report presents findings from a survey of 689 UK comic creators conducted in autumn 2025, building on data gathered in the 2020 UK Comics Creator Survey. It documents the structural challenges facing the UK comics industry and offers concrete recommendations for funders, policymakers, and industry bodies. The picture which emerges is one of an industry gaining cultural visibility and audience demand while simultaneously losing the structural conditions needed to sustain its creators. Comics are more mainstream than ever, yet for most people producing them, financial stability remains elusive, overwork is endemic, and institutional support is sparse.

Respondents

The survey captures a broad cross-section of the UK comics community. Over three-quarters of respondents (76.8%) identified as professional comic creators, with the remainder comprising publishers, educators, hobbyists, and community organisers. Of those with a professional career in comics, respondents were fairly evenly split between emerging (38%), established (30.6%), and career-intending (31.4%) creators.

The comic community differs markedly from the general UK population across several dimensions:

- 13% of respondents identified as non-binary (vs. ~0.06% in ONS 2021 data), and just 57% identified as straight (vs. 89% nationally).
- 44% identified as neurodivergent (vs. an estimated 15% nationally), and 25% identified as disabled (vs. 17.8% nationally).
- The community remains predominantly white (88.6%), with Black and Asian creators significantly underrepresented relative to the national population.

Financial Realities

Of the 76.8% of respondents who want comic creation to be their primary career, fewer than one in three are currently able to achieve this. Only 144 respondents (around 1/4 of all career-oriented creators) earn the majority of their income from comics.

Even traditional publishing, which provides income for 39% of respondents, rarely affords a living wage: 89% of those earning from traditional publishing make less than the 2024 UK National Living Wage of £22,308 per year. As a result, creators rely on a patchwork of income sources:

- 57% earn income from self-published print (up from 50% in 2020)
- 30% from private commissions; 25% from merchandise
- 72% from employment outside of comics (freelance, temporary, fixed-term or permanent)
- 13% are relying on UK state benefits (up from 9% in 2020)

63% of respondents cited lack of financial income as a key challenge to their career. With material costs, printing, and postage all rising exponentially, and with no equivalent increase in rates paid by publishers or commissioners, creators are earning less for more work.



© Alex Norris

Key Challenges

Cost of Living Crisis

Rising costs of living are hollowing out the conditions needed for the comics industry to sustain itself: publishers are reducing risk, creator rates are stagnant or declining, and audiences have less disposable income. Independent and emerging creators are hit hardest, as readers with limited budgets gravitate toward familiar, established titles. Meanwhile, self-publishing carries its own escalating costs, with platform fees, print costs, and postage all increasing substantially since 2020.

Public Funding and Institutional Infrastructure

Comics receives negligible sustained public investment relative to other art forms. While efforts have been made by Arts Council England and Creative Scotland to better understand the comics sector, the knowledge, time, and capacity required to navigate funding applications remain systematically out of reach for creators and organisations already working in financially precarious conditions. While the vast majority of creators are technically eligible for public funding, many are unaware, intimidated by the process, or practically unable to secure funding.

Brexit and International Trade

Brexit has had a lasting impact on the industry: international shipping is now costly and administratively complex, materials cost more to import, and European sales have fallen. For many creators, previously viable markets are now effectively inaccessible. US tariffs have compounded these difficulties. Beyond economics, many respondents described a sense of cultural narrowing and professional isolation as a result of reduced cross-border collaboration.

Artificial Intelligence

96% of respondents do not use Generative AI in their workflows, yet 36% report having lost work or income because of AI. Smaller commissions (portraits, covers, logos, event art) have largely dried up as clients turn to AI-generated alternatives. Many creators report their work being used without consent to train the very models now replacing them. As of 2026, there are no dedicated governmental protections for UK comic creators against these harms.

Health and Wellbeing

Burnout, chronic overwork, and mental health difficulties are common across the comic creator community. Physical health issues including repetitive strain injuries, chronic back pain, and vision problems sit alongside anxiety, depression, and imposter syndrome. 57% of respondents cited a lack of time to create as a key challenge to their career, while 31% reported a lack of confidence in their own abilities. There are almost no institutional structures to support recovery from burnout or career disruption. Community support was identified as a critical protective factor: those who had community support demonstrated significantly more positive outlooks on the industry and their prospects within it.

Inclusivity and Representation

While the comics community is diverse across many dimensions, access to the industry remains unequal. Women and non-binary creators are more likely to perform all production roles, while men dominate better-paid work-for-hire. Global Majority, disabled creators, older creators, and those from working-class backgrounds describe persistent discrimination and exclusion, both from informal industry networks and formal publishing structures. Table fees, travel costs, and inaccessible application processes further limit participation from underrepresented groups.

Recommendations

The report makes seven core recommendations:

- 1** Develop comics-specific vocational training and apprenticeships, prioritising craft-based and regionally accessible provision.
- 2** Create practical guidance resources covering financial management, taxation, IP rights, and freelance business skills.
- 3** Introduce short-term financial safety nets like gap-funding bursaries and emergency grants to prevent creators from being forced out of the industry during income gaps.
- 4** Invest in a UK-specific creator-to-audience platform which enables regional community patronage, integrates with local cultural infrastructure, and prioritises accessibility and human-generated works.
- 5** Fund subsidised table fees and travel bursaries for conventions, and support smaller regional festivals through partnerships with local councils, libraries, cultural venues and funders, prioritise accessibility, offer training and resources to encourage grassroots events.
- 6** Introduce sector-specific wellbeing initiatives for freelancers, including peer networks, mentoring schemes, best-practice guidance on fair pay and working conditions, subsidised mental health support, and community studio spaces.
- 7** Recognise comics as a cultural art form in UK policy and increase Arts Council funding proportionally, based on the French model as an aspirational framework.

A VOCATION AND AN AFFLICTION

“I LOVE COMICS. THEY ARE ACCESSIBLE AND FUN AND TELL THE MOST INCREDIBLE AND COMPELLING STORIES. WHAT A MEDIUM! THE COMICS INDUSTRY IS A RUSTY OLD BEAST WITH CROWDS OF CREATORS CLINGING TO ITS MANE.”

The main driving factor behind the comics scene is the enthusiasm creators feel towards their craft. The potential for creativity, for expression, and for connection with readers is a source of joy and self-identity for many respondents. This warmth also extends to their peers and creative community, who provide inspiration and encouragement. There is a sense that this sincerity towards a shared ambition is responsible for invigorating the UK comics scene: **‘there seems to be a genuine passion for great storytelling that focuses on humanity and authentic experiences, rather than the cynical, rampant commercialism that has infected so many art forms. The increase in popularity of comics seems to reflect a desire for this too.’**

While the comic industry has a long history of thriving on the edges - of other art forms, societal norms, or political discourse - it has, in recent years, made significant forays into mainstream culture. From massive franchises stemming from Marvel Comics to manga sections in bookshops rapidly expanding to meet popular demand to middle-grade graphic novel series topping bestseller lists, comics are certainly no longer viewed as niche.

The surge of interest in comics and graphic novels in the UK is reflected in official sales figures, which have more than doubled over the last five years. As one respondent explained: **‘the biggest explosion has been in books for younger readers, what I call ‘the Dog Man shelf’, adding ‘The success of Jamie Smart’s Bunny Vs Monkey is the single greatest thing to happen in British comics since I was a kid’**. This tidal wave of young readers eager for comics is a much-needed invigorating force in the commercial viability of graphic novels, but also represents a wider cultural acceptance of comics.

With wider reach comes an abandonment of stereotypes: there is no longer a specific ‘type’ of person who reads comics, and neither is there a genre-defining hegemony of narratives or characters. Increased diversity in stories is also reflected in the industry which produces them.

Traditional publishing – some decades ago the only possibility to have one’s work read – is by no means a majority representation of comic creators. Self-publishing has made it possible to create limited volumes of niche-targeted work, allowing creators to develop along lines of interest that are closely connected with those of their audiences. This goes hand in hand with social media offering unprecedented advertising and publicity tools, though at the price of there being many more people vying for the audience’s attention, and being at the mercy of algorithmic curation.

While the absence of gatekeeping authorities has opened opportunities for previously sidelined creations, the do-it-yourself ethos of digital comic markets also places a significantly larger workload on comic creators, who often have to be a social media manager, brand strategist, publisher, and postal service employee on top of their already heavy workload.

And though the increased interest from audiences is a welcome addition, creators who do publish through traditional publishers and webcomic platforms as authors, co-creators or in a work-for-hire capacity are feeling the squeeze of tightening submission deadlines and reduced remuneration in the face of increased competition.

For many creators, this is in addition to a ‘day job’ which provides them with a minimum of financial security that is not easily found within the comic publishing industry. This splits the creator community into those who can afford to be full-time creators and those who have to fracture themselves into multiples in order to survive. This split is reflected in the landscape of comic community events, too: with rising costs of tables at comic cons and numerous indie festivals ceasing to exist due to funding cuts and changing priorities, more diversity in offerings does not necessarily translate to more inclusivity.

In the UK, the circumstantial pressures on comic creators are immense: the cost of living crisis is raising survival costs, post-Brexit customs charges have made international shipping labour-intensive and costly, US tariffs have rendered state-side shipping uneconomical, and audiences having less money means fewer sales. Additionally, exploitative platforms like Webtoon which demand shockingly short turnover times from their artists are changing the pace of digital comic consumption. The cost is carried by creators: burnouts and overwork-related health issues are common, with next to no institutional structures to support recovery.

As a result, attitudes towards the UK comic industry are starkly split between those who see **'a hopeful frontier'** for **'a beautiful, cherished and respected art and literature form'** and those who view the sector's future as **'a burning dumpster fire'**. Many creators are caught in between, wanting to believe in their craft but struggling with the harsh realities of finding no support. One creator noted: **'I am now more resigned to making comics, as if it's somewhere between a vocation and an affliction'**.

While the industry has never been an easy one to break into, many of the present challenges are directly related to political developments. Brexit has had an irrevocable impact on material costs and postage, cuts to Arts & Culture funding have shoe-strung independent festivals and publishers, and 'trickle down' policies have yet to trickle to anyone who is down in the UK comic industry.

In mainstream publishing, the UK market competes with both US superhero legacies and the increasing demand for Japanese and Korean manga series, but with far fewer governmental support structures than its European neighbours France and Belgium. A lack of support also means a lack of safeguards. AI-generated content is throwing a spanner into creative works around the globe, devaluing certain types of work in favour of others and undermining creative integrity, but as of 2026, creators in Britain do not have any governmental cushions to fall back on in order to protect their work or careers.

Many artists are resigned to the neck-breaking pace of the industry, and the exhaustion and burnout that come with it, but this shouldn't be accepted as the norm. Safety measures, career cushions and IP protection are all needed, as are serious discussions about health, inclusion, and community representation.

Reflecting on the past five years in the UK comic sector, this report provides evidence of key challenges faced by creators, publishers, and people within the industry, and offers recommendations and solutions as to how these challenges may be addressed going forward.

"IT'S A LABOUR OF LOVE – I DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT MANY PEOPLE ARE IN IT FOR THE MONEY, BUT INSTEAD BECAUSE THEY WANT TO TELL STORIES."

7am

woken by sounds

was that a dream of someone reversing into the car or was it real



8am

brekker

big bitch on its 2nd huge tea



little bitch on its 2nd breakfast (not rejected)

9am

shop orders



10am

posting orders etc etc

oh it's bin day they were bin sounds



11am

on phone with GP

I was told to phone today about booking a nurse appt with [redacted]



idk either I phoned on monday and they said to phone back today

oh great I was expecting to have to wait until April or something

12pm

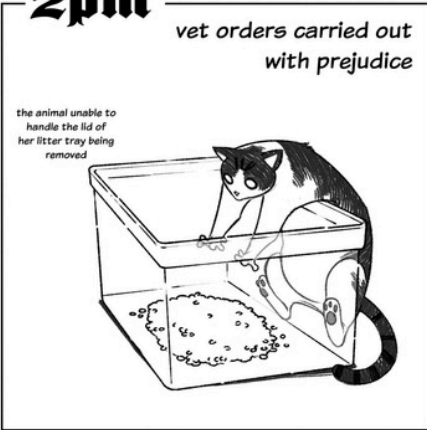
work start



2pm

vet orders carried out with prejudice

the animal unable to handle the lid of her litter tray being removed



3pm

work

did the cat piss yet?

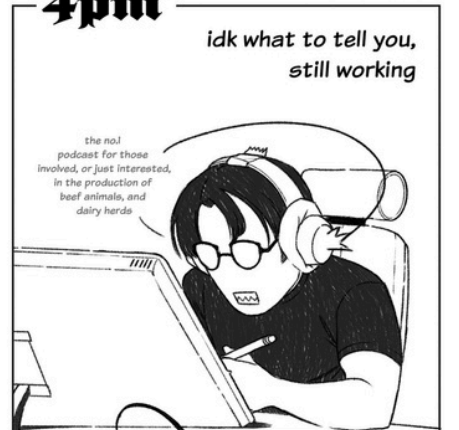
no



4pm

idk what to tell you, still working

the no! podcast for those involved, or just interested, in the production of beef animals, and dairy herds



5pm

the man returns from war

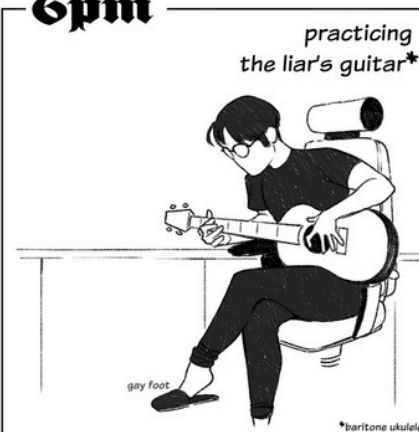


6pm

practicing the liar's guitar*

gay foot

*baritone ukulele



8pm

tools down

imagine if you pronounced 'forage' like you say Nigel Farage

I went for a forrāj

I forrājed some nuts and berries



READY TO REPORT

“I LOVE COMICS, I LOVE THE COMIC INDUSTRY IN THE UK AND HOW DYNAMIC AND INTERESTING IT IS. IT’S HARD WORK, BUT IT’S FULL OF DIVERSE, INCREDIBLY TALENTED PEOPLE.”

Key Aims

This survey was designed to build systematically on the evidence base established by the 2020 UK Comics Creator Survey, which sought to identify the strengths and shortcomings of the sector, provide data for use in funding bids and advocacy, address questions of diversity, and make the case for a dedicated backbone organisation for comics creators. The 2025 survey was conceived with three core aims:

- 1** To update and extend this evidence base to establish what has materially changed for creators in the subsequent five years;
- 2** To make visible the structural support shortcomings which shape working conditions in the UK comics sector, including income precarity, lack of social protection, and public funding scarcity;
- 3** To articulate solutions and concrete recommendations for funders, policymakers, and industry bodies to improve these conditions and better support the comics industry at large.

Methodology

689 members of the UK comics community completed a digital survey. Comic creators based in the UK and aged over 16 who produced or were producing work for public audiences were invited to participate in the survey. This consisted of 166 intending to have a career (actively seeking opportunities to earn money from their comics work - 24%), 201 emerging career (earning some money from their comic work - 29%), 162 established career (majority of their income comes from their comic work - 24%), 95 amateur/hobbyists (not intending to earn money from their comics work - 14%), 45 other careers based (7%), and 19 other non-career based (3%). This means that the opinions represented in this survey largely reflect those of professional comic creators (over 2/3 of respondents), with some perspectives of publishers, university lecturers, and community organisers offering insights into other parts of the industry.

Of those with a career in comics (intending, emerging, established, or other career-based), 20% had worked in the industry under two years, 42% between two and ten years, and 38% more than 10 years. Of those without a career in comics (amateur and other non-career based), 16% were involved with comics under two years, 42% between two and ten years, and 42% more than 10 years.

The survey was built and hosted online by the Audience Agency and ran from 5th September 2025 to 9th October 2025. The survey was promoted by partners and stakeholders* via social media, online articles, and direct communications, as well as printed posters and flyers in physical locations. In the survey, participants reported on their experiences in the UK comics industry, including their comics experience, financial considerations, key challenges, and visions for the future. Upon completing the survey, respondents were given the option of entering into a prize draw to win one of three £50 vouchers for an online comic shop of the winner's choice.

The survey results were analysed by Amanda Nicole Curtis and Joanna Rivera-Carlisle, with the support of Tina Curtis, between January and February 2026.

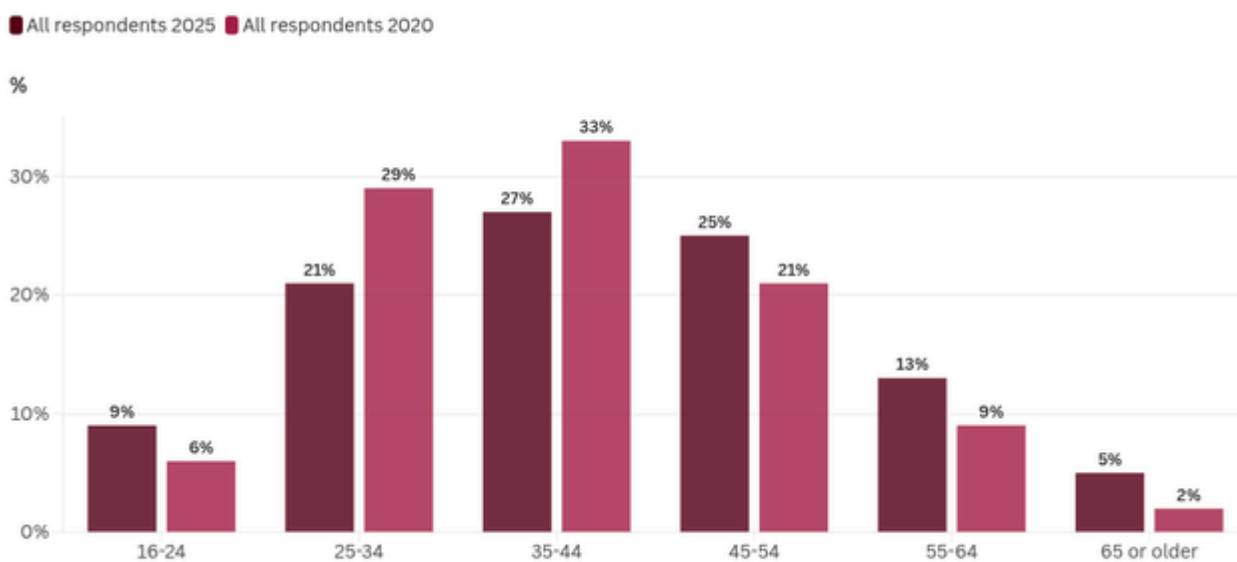
*Arts University Bournemouth; the Association of Comics Creators; the Association of Illustrators; Avery Hill Publishing; Bleeding Cool; Broken Frontier; Cartoon County; The Cartoon Museum; Cartoonists Cooperative; Coffee & Heroes; Comic Book News UK; The Comics Beat; ComicScene Magazine; the Comics Cultural Impact Collective; Comics Youth; DACS; Dave's Comics; Destination Venus; Down the Tubes; First Graphic Novel Competition; Gnash Comics; Gosh Comics; Graphic Medicine International Collective; Lakes International Comic Arts Festival; La Belle Adventure; Little Shop of Heroes; LD Comics; National Centre for Writing; New Writing North; OK Comics; Paper Jam Comics Collective; Portsmouth Comic Con; Quindrie Press; Rebellion Publishing; the Royal Society of Literature; SelfMadeHero; Small Press Scotland; the Society of Authors; Thought Bubble Festival; Travelling Man; the University of Dundee; The Workers Gallery; Writing East Midlands; Writing West Midlands.

Demographics

Overall, the demographics of the comics community differ substantially from the general UK population across multiple dimensions – particularly gender identity, sexual identity, and neurodivergence.

In terms of age, the survey skewed somewhat older than the 2020 comic survey with 57% of respondents aged under 44 years, down from 68%, but significantly younger compared to the UK population, of which 39% are aged 15–44 years. Respondents aged 35–44 made up the largest single group (27%), followed by 45–54 (25%) and 25–34 (21%). Those aged 16–24 were underrepresented at 9%, compared to 6% in the ONS 2021 data for that age band¹¹. The 55+ age groups collectively accounted for 18% of respondents.

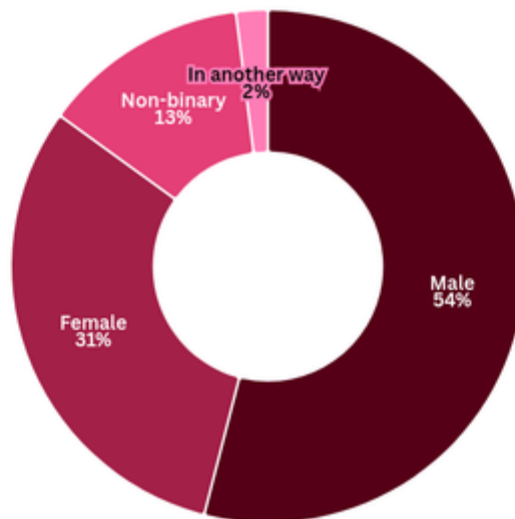
Which of the following age groups do you belong to?



Base: 621/ 591

In terms of gender, the respondent base was majority male (54%), though notably less so than in 2020 (60%). Female respondents accounted for 31%, compared to 33% in 2020. In the UK in 2021, 51% of the population identified as female and 49% as male. In 2023, DCMS estimated that 37.9% of the UK creative industries identified as female⁸. Strikingly, 13% of respondents identified as non-binary, a significant increase from 6% in 2020 and far exceeding the ONS 2021 figure of approximately 0.06% of the England and Wales population. A further 2% of survey respondents described their gender in another way. In total, 24.6% of respondents said their gender is different to the one they were assigned at birth. This is a slight decrease from the 2020 comic data (26%) and considerably higher than the ONS data (0.5%).

Which of the following options best describes your gender identity?

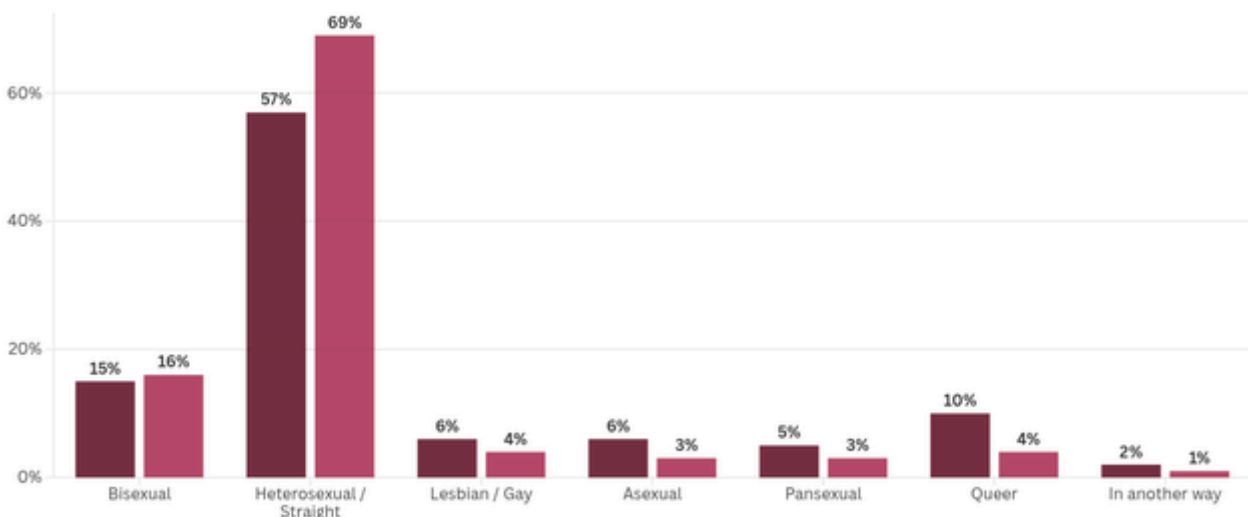


Base: 608

Regarding sexual identity, the comics community is substantially more diverse than the general population across all non-heterosexual identities. Just 57% of respondents (excluding those who preferred not to say) identified as straight, compared to 69% in the 2020 comic survey and approximately 89% in the ONS 2021 data. Bisexual respondents accounted for 15% (ONS: 1.28%), queer 10% (ONS: ~0.03%), lesbian or gay 6% (ONS: 1.54%), pansexual 5% (ONS: ~0.10%), and asexual 6% (ONS: ~0.03%).

How would you describe your sexuality?

■ All respondents 2025 ■ All respondents 2020



Base: 587 / 554

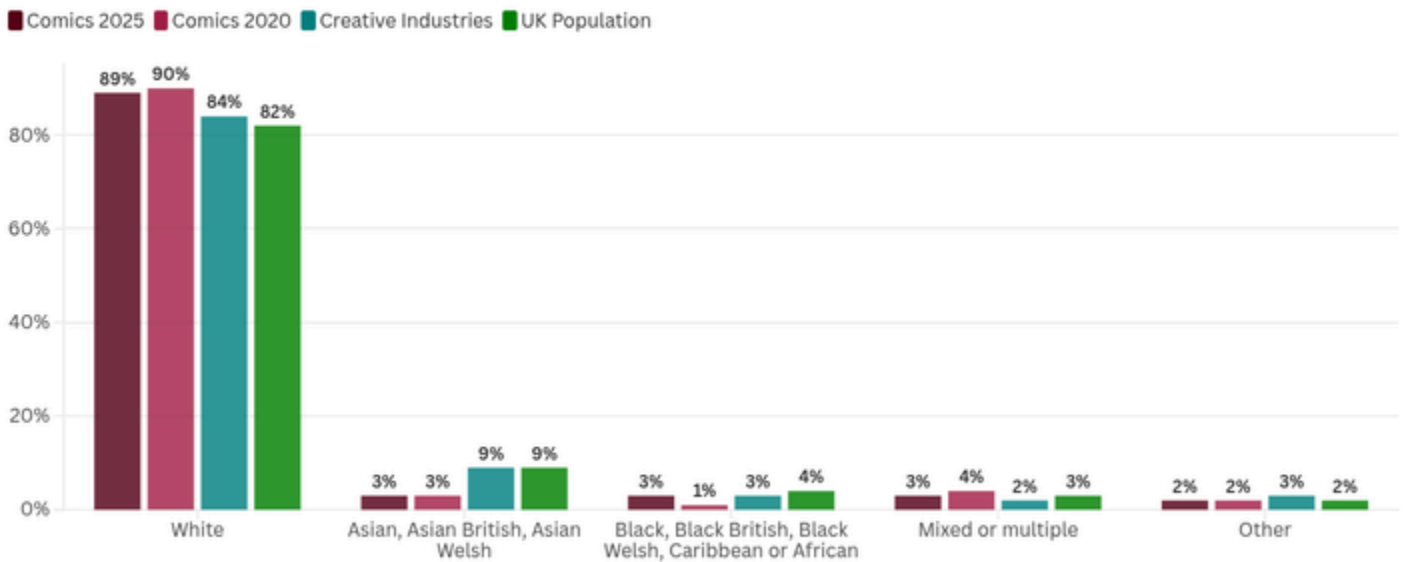
In terms of ethnicity, a majority of respondents identified as White (88.58%), which is slightly higher than the ONS 2021 data (81.7%) and DCMS 2023 data on the UK creative industries (83.6%). 71.36% of all respondents (excluding those who preferred not to say) identified as English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British; 13.58% as Other White background; 3.48% as Irish; 0.17% as Gypsy or Irish Traveller.

Notably, 3.31% of respondents identified as Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh (1.16% as Asian or Asian British: Chinese; 1.16% Indian; 0.83% Other Asian Background; 0.17% Bangladeshi) compared to 9.3% of the UK population and 8.7% of UK creative industries.

Just 2.81% identified as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African (1.16% as Black or British Black: African; 0.99% as Caribbean; 0.66% as Other Black/African/Caribbean background) compared to 4.0% of the UK population and 2.7% of UK creative industries.

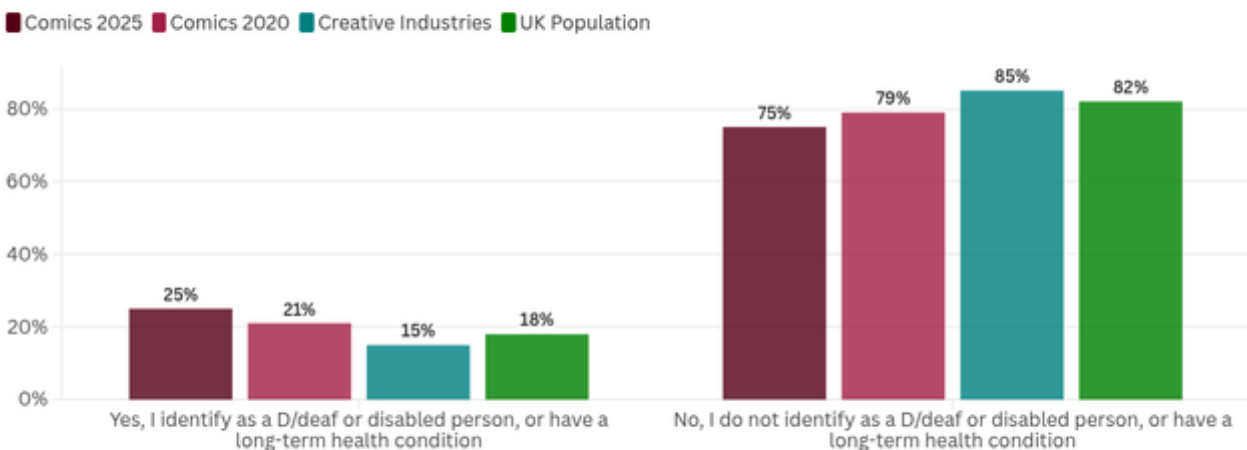
3.31% identified as Mixed or Multiple (0.99% as Mixed: White and Asian; 0.99% as Other Mixed/multiple ethnic backgrounds; 0.66% as White and Latin American; 0.50% as White and Black Caribbean; 0.17% as White and Black African) compared to 2.9% of UK population and 2.3% of UK creative industries. Finally, 1.99% identified as another ethnic group (1.49% as another ethnic group; 0.33% as Arab; 0.17% as Latin American) compared to 2.1% of the UK population and 2.8% of UK creative industries.

What is your ethnic group?



Base: 604 / 583

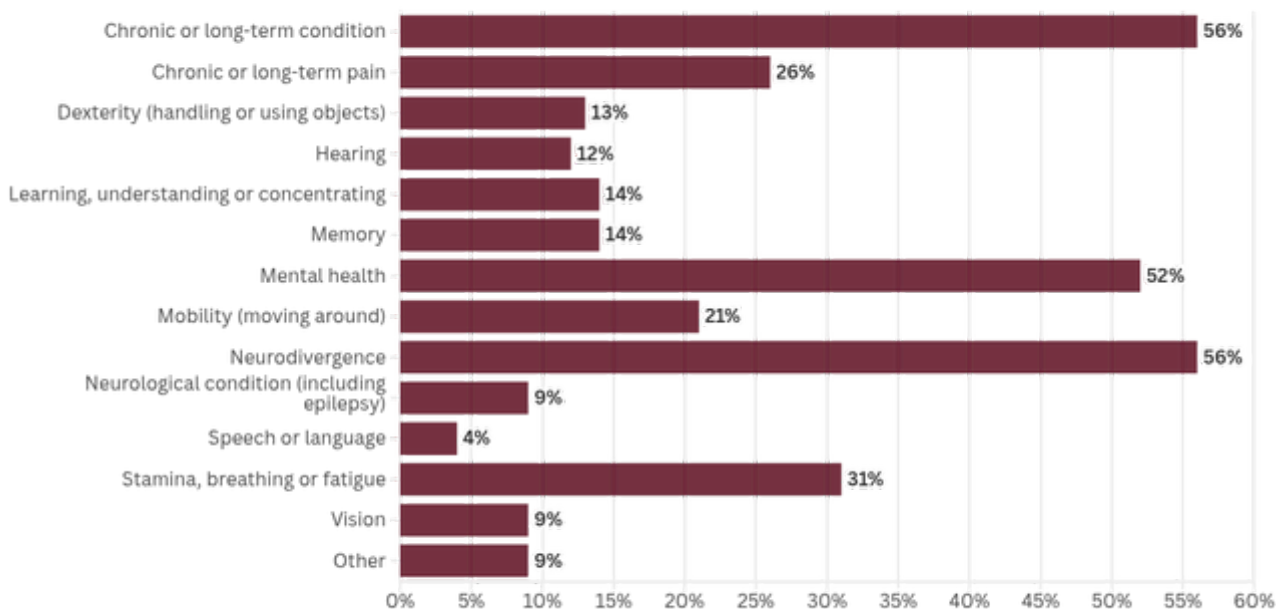
Do you identify as a D/deaf or disabled person, or have a long-term health condition?



Base: 592 / 566

Regarding disability, 25% of respondents (excluding those who preferred not to say) identified as disabled, compared to 21% in the 2020 comic survey, 17.8% of the England and Wales population in the ONS 2021 census, and 14.7% of the UK creative industries according to DCMS.

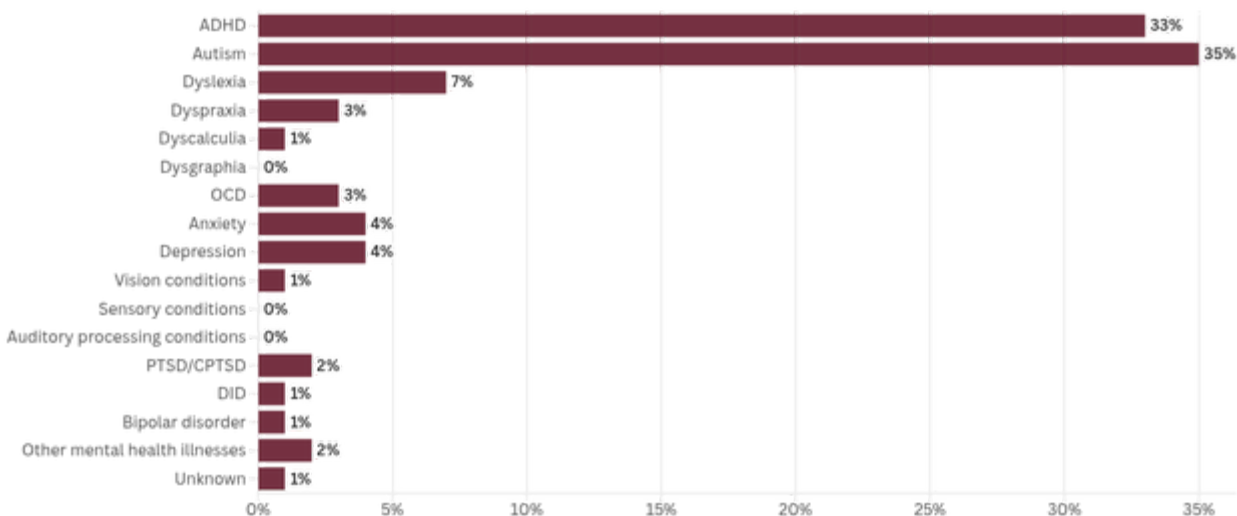
Which of the following best describe your condition/s?



Base: 146

Regarding neurodivergence, 44% of respondents (excluding those who preferred not to say) identified as neurodivergent, compared to 56% who did not. No directly comparable ONS figure exists for neurodivergence as a whole; the ONS does not measure it as a single category. Widely cited estimates suggest approximately 15%–20% of the UK population may be neurodivergent, making the comics community's rate substantially higher than the general population⁶. Overall, 90 respondents or 13% reported having ADHD, and 94 respondents or 14% as being autistic.

Which of the following best describe your condition/s?



Note this includes those who are undiagnosed or self-diagnosed, e.g. "awaiting autism assessment" is counted as 'Autism'

Base: 146

PORTRAIT OF A COMIC ARTIST ON FIRE

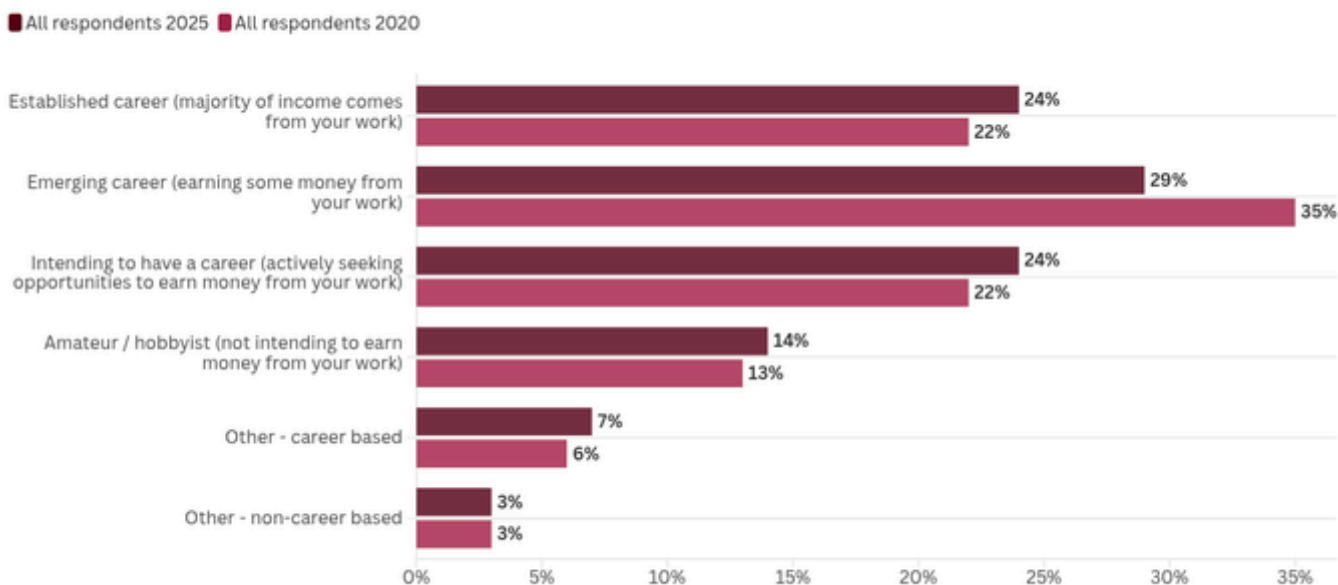
Into the Comicverse

**“COMICS ARE GREAT.
THE INDUSTRY IS VERY DAUNTING.”**

The 689 respondents of our survey were composed of both amateur (13.7%) and professional (76.77%) comic creators, as well as people involved in the comic industry professionally (6.53%) and in other capacities (2.76%).

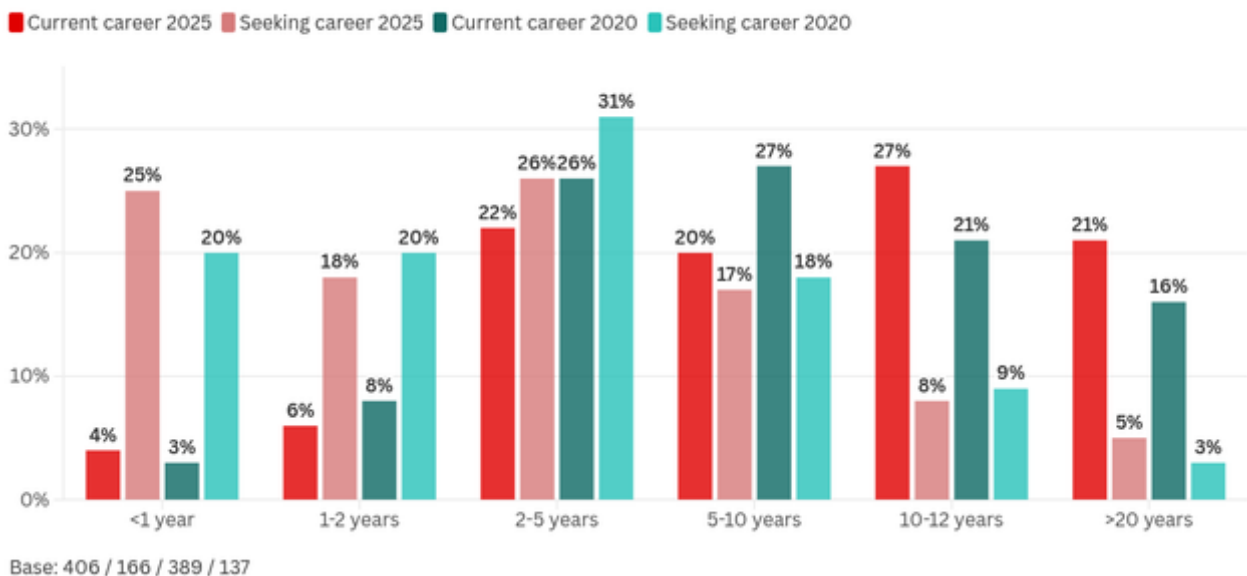
Of the professional comic creators (529 respondents), 38% are in an emerging career stage, meaning they earn some money from their comic work, 30.6% have an established career where the majority of their income comes from their comic work, and 31.4% are intending to have a career as comic creators, actively seeking opportunities to earn money from their work. For the purposes of this report, that means that the perspectives of professional comic creators who filled in the survey are split fairly evenly into thirds of intending – emerging – established, with emerging having a slight percentage edge. However, for the realities represented by these numbers, that means over two thirds of the professional comic creators responding to this survey do not earn the majority of their income from their comic work. In total, only 144 respondents noted that comics are their primary source of income.

How would you characterise your current status as a comics producer?



Base: 688 / 621

For how long have you had or been actively pursuing a career in comics production?



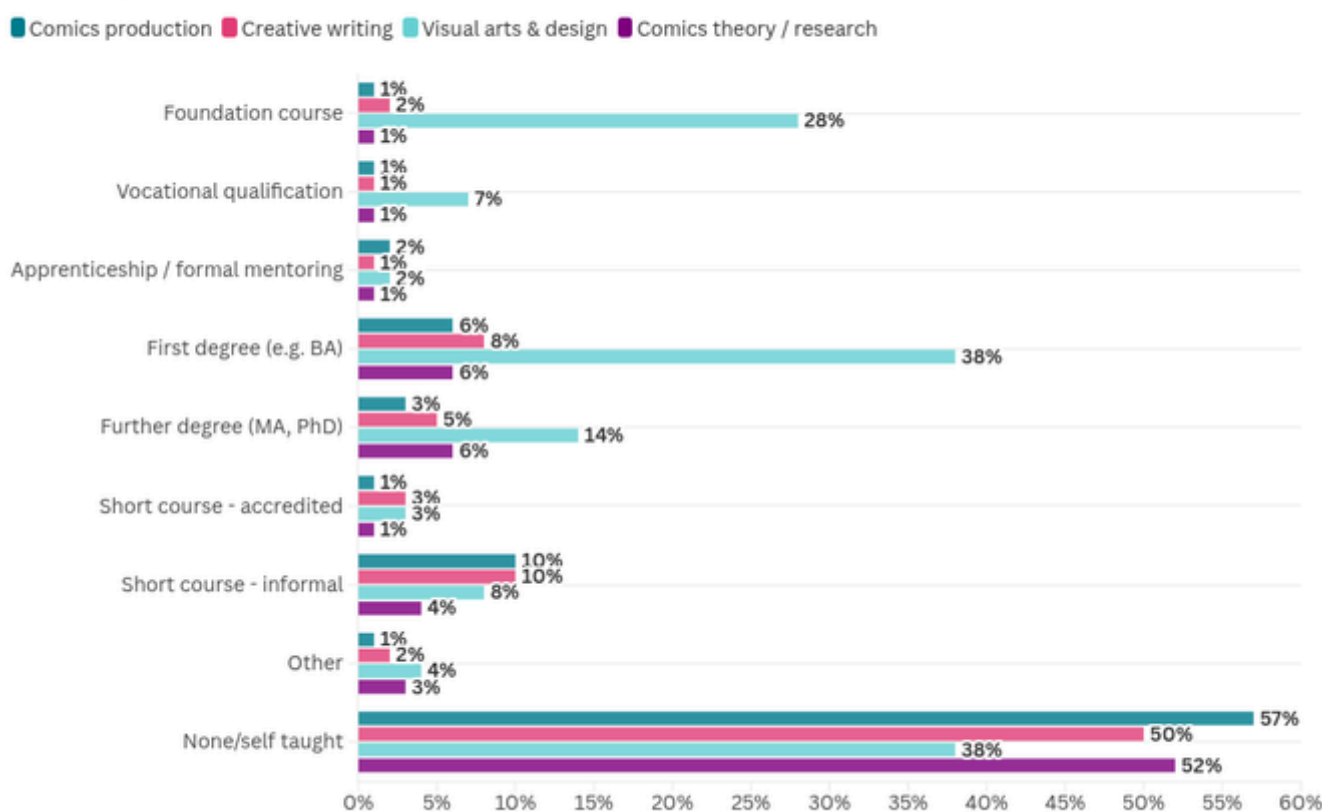
This is crucial: of the 76.77% of overall respondents who want comic creation to be their main career, just under a third are currently able to manage this. That is not taking into account the significant amount of hobbyists for whom this could be a creative career, but who presently are unable to follow this pursuit. While some of these struggles can be found across the arts and culture sector, the comic industry is not like other arts. Its long history of fringe existence is reflected in institutional support structures. As some of our respondents pointed out, while illustration, painting, printmaking, and other print-based fine arts are core elements of any university arts programme, comic creation is a much rarer occurrence on the curriculum.

Moreover, it requires far more than meticulous illustration training, composition, and digital editing skills - it also requires writing, character development, sequencing, pacing, and a slew of related storytelling skills which are more likely to be found on a creative writing programme. In contrast to film schools, which offer skills training based on the genre's diverse requirements, similar infrastructures do not exist for comic artists in the UK at scale. 31% of respondents listed lack of confidence in their own ability as a major challenge, with 5% citing it as their main challenge, indicating the potential for educational support.

Of our respondents, only 5.8% did an undergraduate degree in Comic Production, similar to 5.7% in Comic Theory/Research, with a comparison of 8% with a Creative Writing BA and 37.7% in Visual Arts Design. This tendency to more generic design training is also reflected in foundational and vocational training: Comic Production numbers on Foundation Course level (1.3%) and in Vocational Trainings (1.2%) are far lower than Visual Arts Design equivalents (Foundation: 28.2%, Vocational: 6.7%). However, apprenticeship experience numbers are comparable, with Comic Production at 2.2% and Visual Arts Design at 2%. This is indicative of a potential opportunity in the UK vocational training environment.

While Comic Theory opportunities are more likely to be sought out in university settings (undergraduate: 5.7%, graduate: 5.8%, compared to Foundation: 1.5%, Vocational: 0.7%, Apprenticeship: 0.4%), comic production is a craft. In examining how comic creators can be better supported in career building, this difference should be taken into consideration. Perhaps the largest room for opportunities does not lie within a framework oriented towards writing essays and theoretical knowledge production, but in considering critical training structures which put craft first.

What relevant post-school education, training and/or skills development have you received in the following areas?



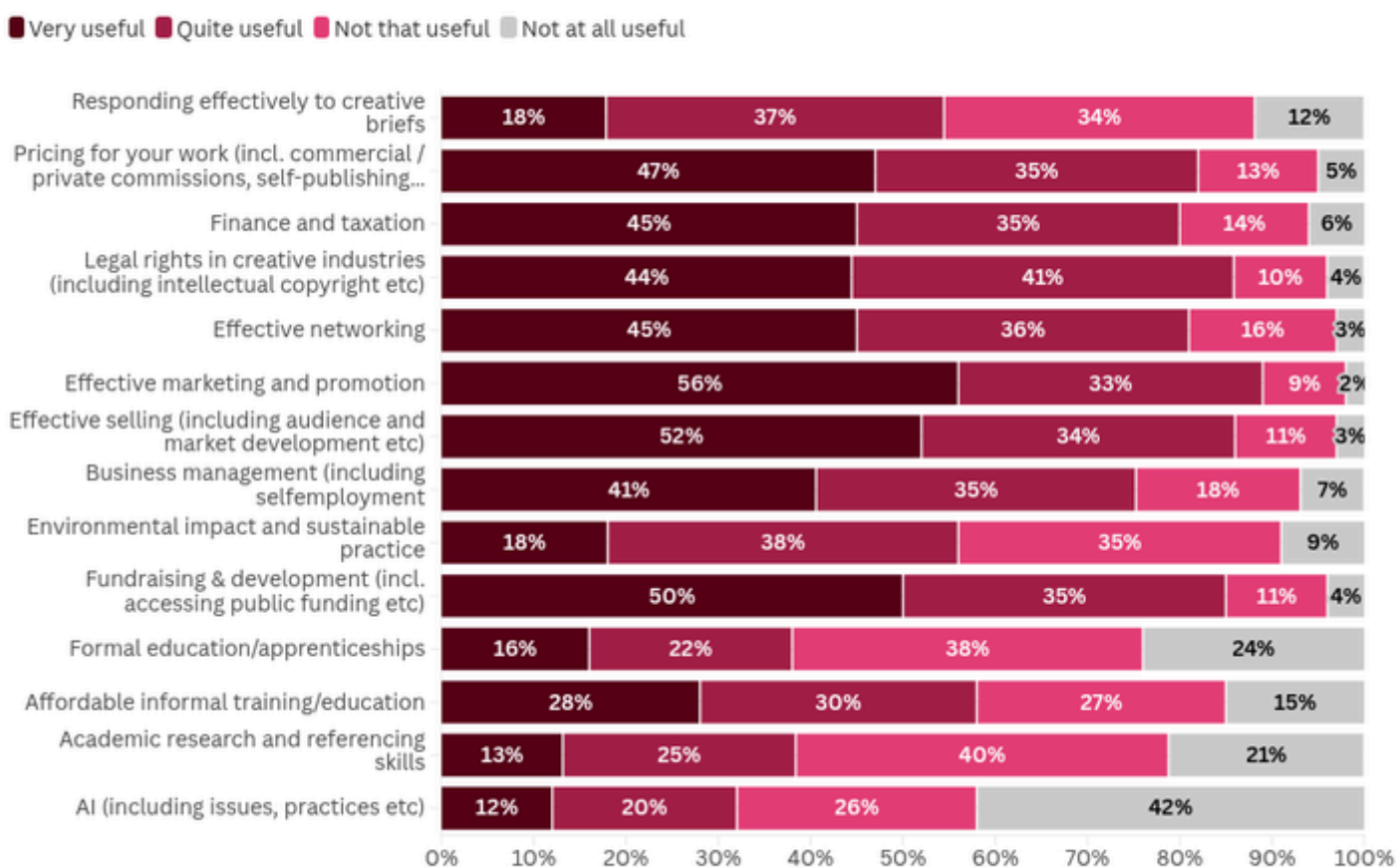
Base: 689 / 689 / 689 / 689

In both Comic Production and Creative Writing, informal short courses (10.4% and 10.4%) are popular training options for comic creators, with 58% saying that affordable informal training or education would be useful in relation to their comic production. However, the comparable percentages of creators who choose multi-year university degrees (9.3% and 13.1%, respectively) also indicates interest in longer-term, structured training opportunities, with 38% of respondents saying that formal education or apprenticeships would be useful.

Comic creation is not a quick-to-learn set of skills, and the majority of our respondents have been honing their skills for years. This amounts to 5 or more years of experience for 58% of professionals and 61% of amateurs, with 81% of all respondents having at least 2 years of comic creation experience. These numbers have stayed relatively consistent for the past five years, with many respondents stating that from their perspective, opportunities in the industry have not dramatically changed.

Alongside the craft of comics, there is a range of necessary entrepreneurial and business skills required to turn artistic practise into a livelihood. When asked which areas of training and development creators felt they would benefit from, 89% said effective marketing and promotion; 86% said effective selling; 85% wanted to learn more about their legal rights in the creative industries; 85% were interested in learning about fundraising and development; 82% wanted to know more about how to price their work; 81% wanted to learn about effective networking, and 80% wanted training in finance and taxation. The eagerness to learn these fundamental skills speaks to creators' ambitions to cement comics as a career, and lack of provisions to help them do so.

How useful would the following training / development areas be to you in relation to your comic production?



Base: 590 / 604 / 602 / 598 / 604 / 602 / 600 / 592 / 586 / 602 / 580 / 583 / 580 / 563

Key Points

- Lack of comic-specific training opportunities
- Room for vocational training and apprenticeships for comic creators
- Demand for marketing, finance, business and legal training necessary for creative entrepreneurship



I FELL OUT OF LOVE WITH DRAWING. HAPPENS FROM TIME TO TIME.



THE ROTE SHAPES, THE MUSCLE MEMEORY, THE SAME OLD CACHE OF LINES AND GESTURES...



IT CAN GET STALE AND PREDICTABLE.



TROUBLE IS, WITHOUT THE COMICS, I LOSE MY VOICE AND MY AUDIENCE.



HOW ELSE TO COMMUNICATE MY HOPES AND FEARS, MY RELATABLE CONTENT?



PERHAPS I'LL TAKE UP SAXOPHONE.

© Joe Decie

Have You Made it Yet?

“I WISH I COULD SPEND MORE TIME MAKING MY OWN COMICS AND LESS TIME ON THE STUFF THAT ACTUALLY PAYS THE BILLS (MENTORING, SPEAKING, TUTORING, COMMISSIONS ETC)”

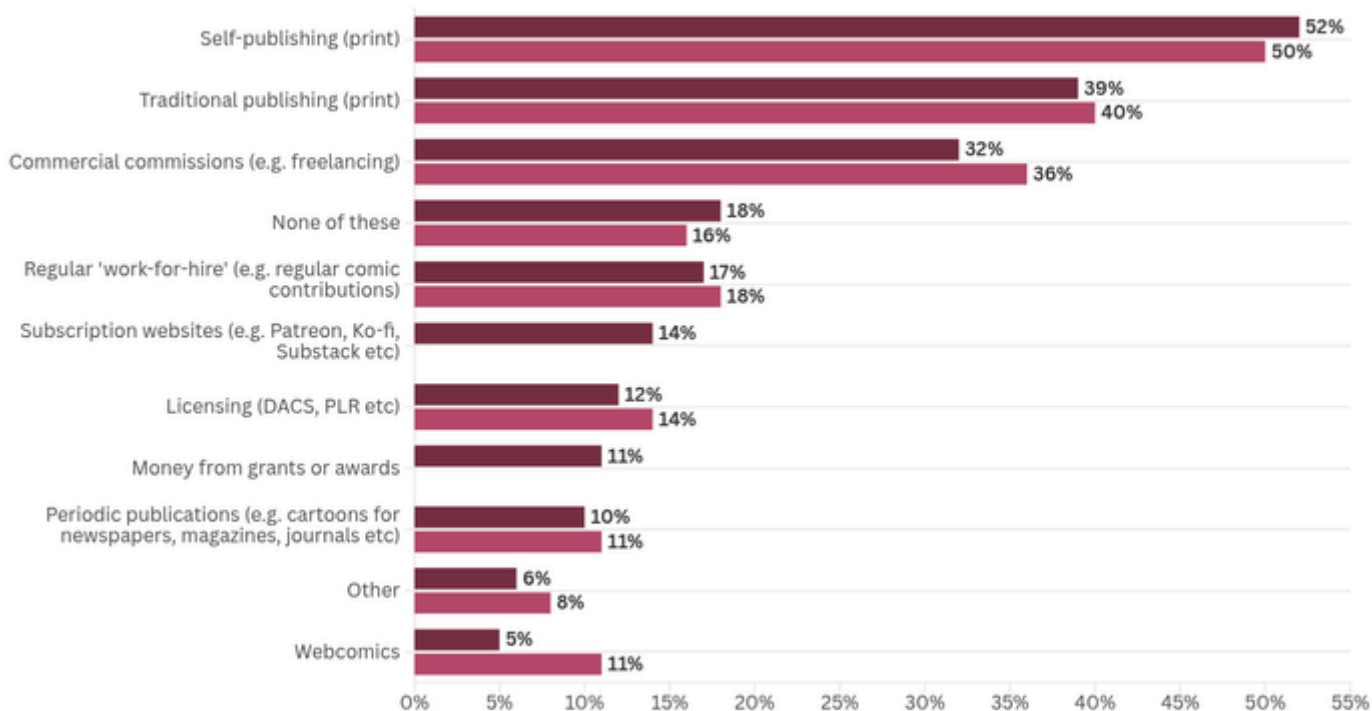
For the 574 respondents who have a career in comics – whether as creators, publishers, or in other roles – and receive income directly related to comics, self-published comics have become a more viable source of income in the past five years. 57% of respondents gain income from this revenue channel, a marked increase from 50% in the 2020 survey. Self-publishing offers two key opportunities: firstly, creators of niche works can produce high-quality, low quantity editions to sell at a comparatively high price. One respondent stated: **‘Digital printing means that one can create a graphic novel, print 4 or 5 copies for £50 plus, and a Kindle edition’**, adding that this was **‘impossible’** when they started in the industry.

Secondly, creators who feel gatekept by the editing practices of traditional publishing can gain creative and financial control over their outputs. As a result, the number of creators gaining income from self-publishing is significantly higher than traditional publishing (39%) and more than for webcomics (5%), periodic publications (10%), licensing (12%) and grant funding (11%) combined. It is worth noting, however, that these questions allowed for multiple answers, as the majority of comic creators rely on multiple revenue streams. This is evident in percentages increasing across the board since 2020, meaning that more respondents chose several income sources.

This includes non-production revenue sources from which respondents earned income indirectly related to their comics creation, such as hosting workshops both in-person (20%) and online (9%), giving talks (18%), teaching (4%), tutoring (6%), and mentoring (5%). In the past five years, there has been a notable increase in online workshops (2025: 10%, 2020: 4%), likely due to the increased popularity of online meeting technology following the global COVID-19 pandemic. There is an increase in income derived from merchandise sales (2025: 25%, 2020: 23%) and almost a third of creators generate income from private commissions (30%). While several respondents expressed gratitude for these alternative revenue streams, they largely have to shoulder the additional burden of organising, negotiating, and carrying out these additional roles without a structured support system.

From what sources do you receive income directly related to your comic production?

■ All respondents 2025 ■ All respondents 2020

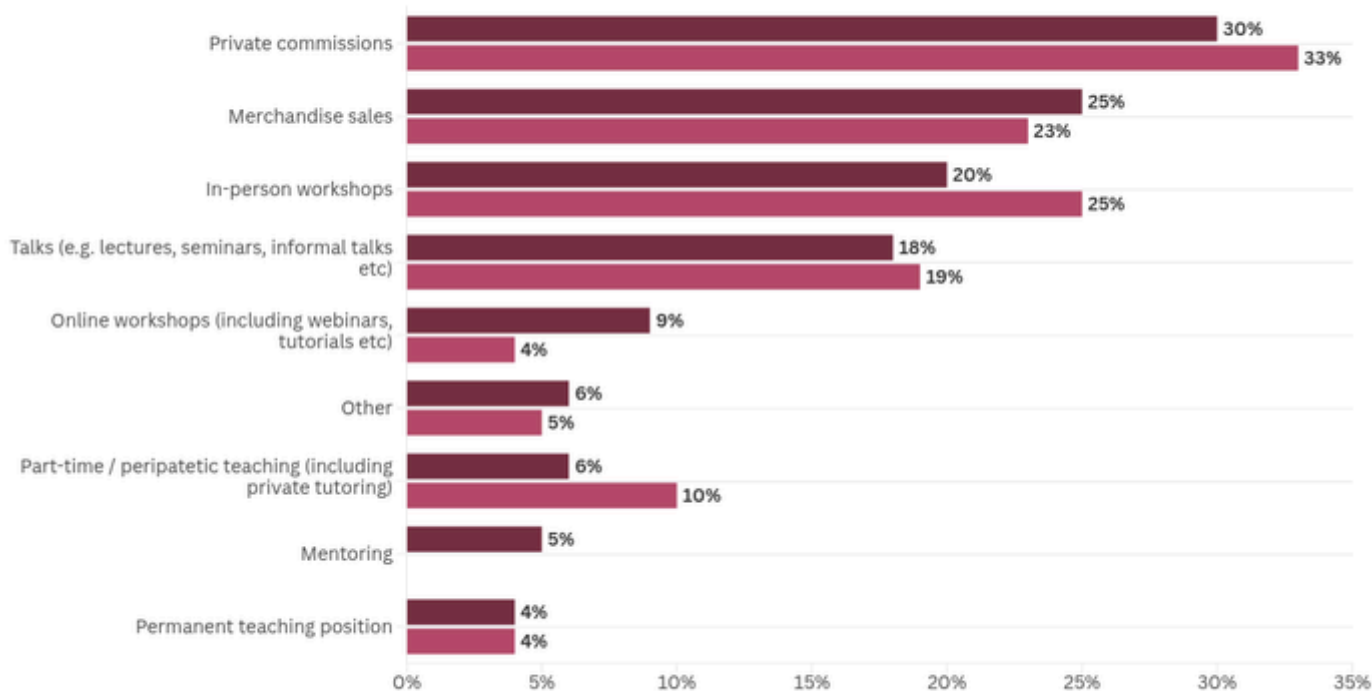


N.b 'subscription websites' and 'money from grants or awards' were not included as separate options in 2020

Base: 685 / 619

From what sources do you receive income indirectly related to your comic production?

■ All respondents 2025 ■ All respondents 2020



N.b 'subscription websites' and 'money from grants or awards' were not included as separate options in 2020

Base: 672 / 613

Even in traditional publishing, however, which has provided 39% of respondents with income in 2025 as opposed to 40% in 2020, receiving pay does not necessarily mean making a living wage. Of 265 respondents with an income from traditional publishing, only 11% made over £20,000 in the year 24–25. This means 89% of creators' annual income was well below the 2024 National Living Wage in the UK (£22,308). Therefore, having multiple sources of income across different publishing formats is a reality most creators face.

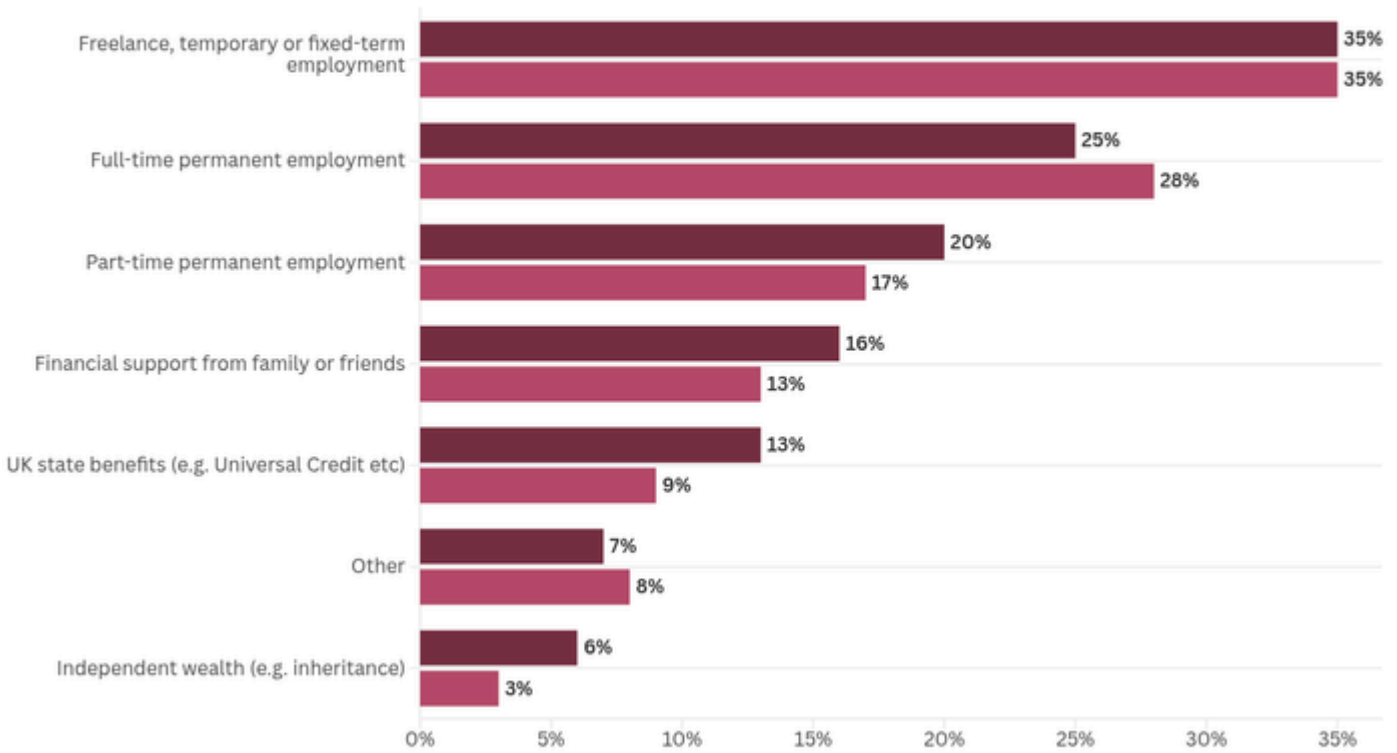
While some respondents framed the resulting fragmentation of the industry into a digital vs. print divide, others see both forms as **'sitting happily side-by-side'**. In comparison to 11% in 2020, only 5% of creators made an income from webcomics in 2025. This is influenced by the international positioning of key platforms, such as Webtoon, and their target consumer markets, but also by limited entry-level supports at national level. This could offer opportunities for UK-focused support structures for locally rooted web comic platforms.

Subscription websites like Patreon, Ko-fi, or Substack, which were only mentioned on the sidelines in the 2020 survey, could serve as a useful case study for such a structure. They now generate income for 14% of respondents while operating on similar principles as web comic platforms: supporting single-series, per-episode payment structures and bundles for specific formats and genres. Key differences are more control on the side of artists, a more direct relationship between individual supporters and the artists, and an overall more flexible and less exploitative work culture. These can be a lifeline for maintaining audiences throughout long projects, as one respondent notes **'I can only rely on my supporters on Patreon and other platforms. Keeping that kind of close-to-the-ground network is the only reason that I'm able to continue'**. Existing alongside webcomic platforms and non-digital structures, subscription and pay-for-support platforms present innovation potential for the UK comic market. Enabling local comic creators to expand on existing revenue formats and establish viable alternatives to traditional publishing will be key to making the comic sector a sustainable career option.

Non-comic related sources of income include, in descending order: freelance, temporary, or fixed-term employment (35%), full-time permanent paid employment (25%), part-time permanent employment (20%), financial support from family or friends (16%), UK state benefits (13%), independent wealth [e.g. inheritance] (6%), and other sources (7%).

From what sources do you receive financial income other than your comic production?

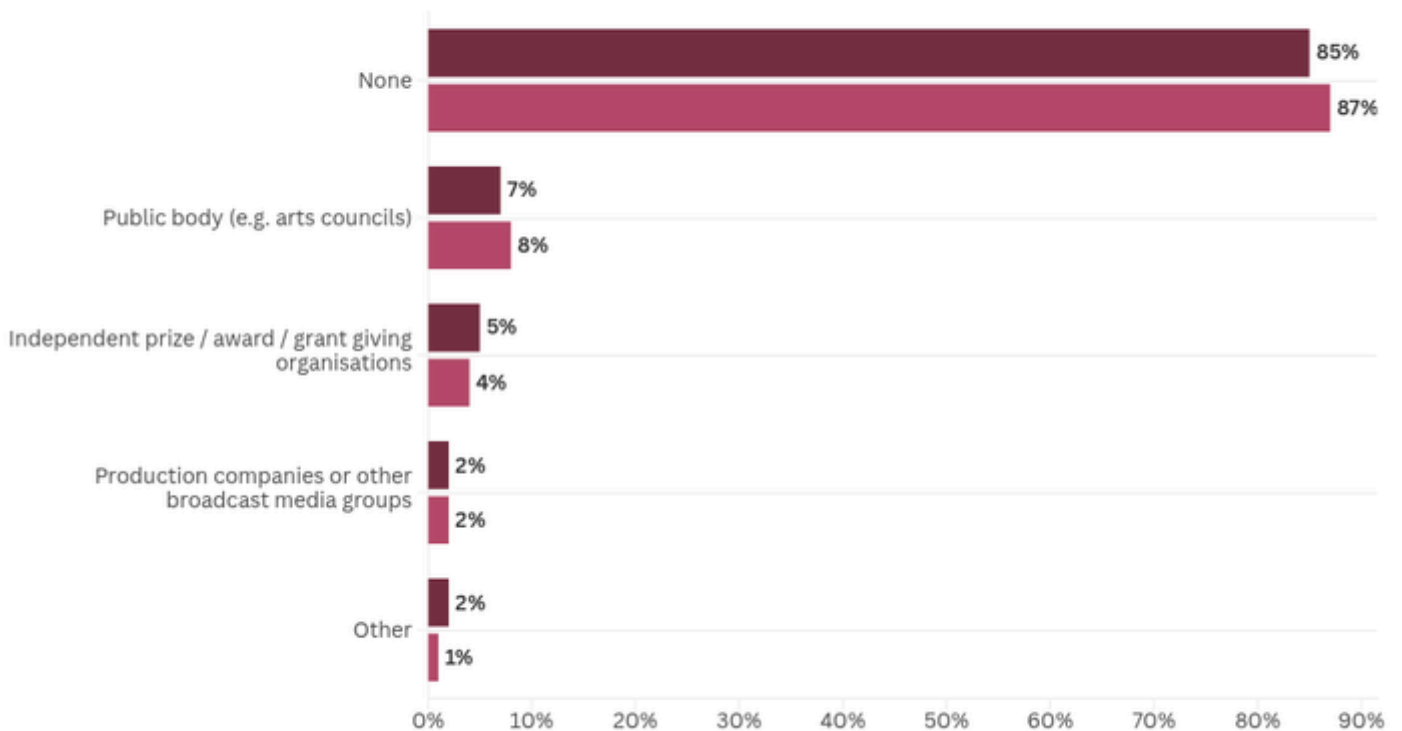
■ All respondents 2025 ■ All respondents 2020



Base: 668/ 615

Do you receive any other financial support related to your comic production?

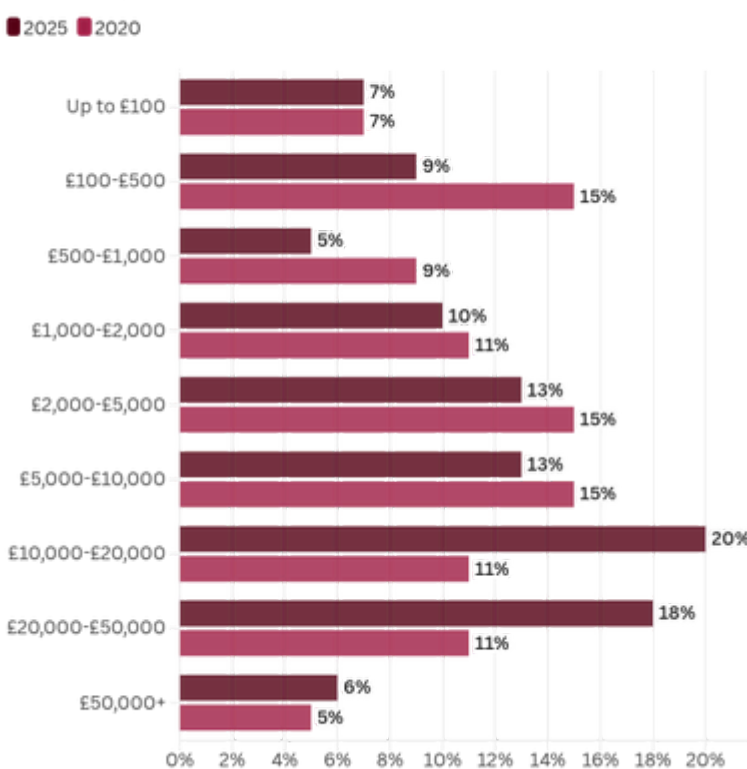
■ All respondents 2025 ■ All respondents 2020



Base: 658 /612

Notable is the rise of creators drawing on financial support from family or friends (16% in 2025 compared to 13% in 2020) and independent wealth such as savings and inheritance (6% in 2025 compared to 3% in 2020). On the one hand, this supports several respondents' concerns over the comic industry becoming a space in which people from privileged backgrounds are more likely to thrive. On the other hand, this increase can also be seen as a marker of more creators needing to seek support from family, friends, or savings because commercial opportunities cannot sufficiently sustain them. The rising number of creators receiving UK state benefits (13% in 2025 in comparison to 9% in 2020) indicates that there may be more need to rely on non-commercial sources of income, whether this is due to lack of opportunities, access, health, or personal reasons.

Total comics income from creators who earn from Traditional Publishing



Base: 225 / 201

While the average number of income streams of traditionally published creators range between 1.9 and 2.84 in the £0-£2000 income bracket, those earning over £2000 a year tend to have 3 or more income streams on average. This stays relatively consistent all the way up to the £50,000+ bracket. 7% of traditionally published survey respondents earned less than £100, 9% earned 'between £100 and £500', 5% earned 'between £500 and £1,000', 10% earned 'between £1,000 and £2,000', 13% earned 'between £2,000 and £5,000', 13% earned 'between £5,000 and £10,000', 20% - the largest bracket - earned 'between £10,000 and £20,000', 18% earned 'between £20,000 and £50,000' and 6% earned 'over £50,000'.

The average number of income streams of these respondents ranged from 2.6 to 2.84 in the £100-£2,000 section, with a slight increase thereafter. At 3.8, the £2,000-£5,000 bracket has the highest average income streams, followed by 3.75 in the £5,000-£10,000 bracket and 3.5 in the £10,000-£20,000 bracket. While these differences are slight, it does indicate that traditionally published creators in the mid income ranges diversify their income streams more, and that this does not significantly decrease for the high earners, with the £50,000 bracket having an average of 3 income streams.

30.65% of the 584 respondents who receive income from abroad earn over 25% of their income from non-UK sources. Of those 30.65%, 13.35% (78 respondents) earn 25-50% of their income from abroad, 7.02% (41 respondents) earn 50-75% of their income abroad, and 10.27% earn 75-100% of their income from foreign sources. The US is the key market for these income sources: 63% of those earning from foreign sources earn from the US, leaving the next closest markets far behind. 16% of those with foreign income sources earned from Canada, 14% from France, 12% from Germany, and 10% from Australia.

Amongst those who earn the majority of their income abroad - 50% and above - this trend is even more visible. Of the 50%+ earners, 81.7% received income from the US, 18.3% from Canada, 13.4% from France, 11% from Germany, and only 1.2% from Australia. Amongst the 50%+ group, Italy (7.3%), Spain (6.1%), Norway (4.9%), Denmark (3.7%), Mexico (3.7%), Belgium (2.4%) and Poland (2.4%) round out the top foreign income sources.

This overt concentration on the US market indicates that if comic creators earn a majority of their income from abroad, they are likely to earn it from the US, which has a far larger, well-financed and somewhat more corporate comics industry. There is a tension between the potential for exporting creative talent and the risk of talent drain from our own nascent industry. In the current climate, there is also a growing awareness of the dangers of becoming too reliant upon another nation. As one creator put it: **'the chaos of the Trump regime with tariffs, censorship and other uncertainty...has left me thinking about how healthy it is to have my fortunes tied to the comics industry of America, and if I should be strengthening my networks closer to home'**.

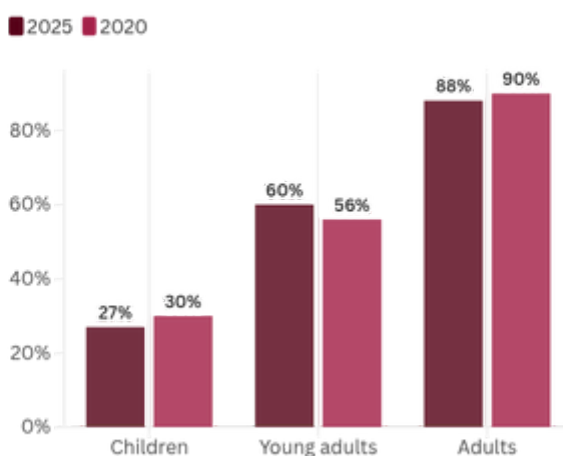
Key Points

- Comic creators have to rely on multiple sources of income to survive, and fulfil multiple roles
- Pay-for-support platforms present innovation potential for UK
- A significant number of creators earn income from overseas, particularly the US.

That's so Niche

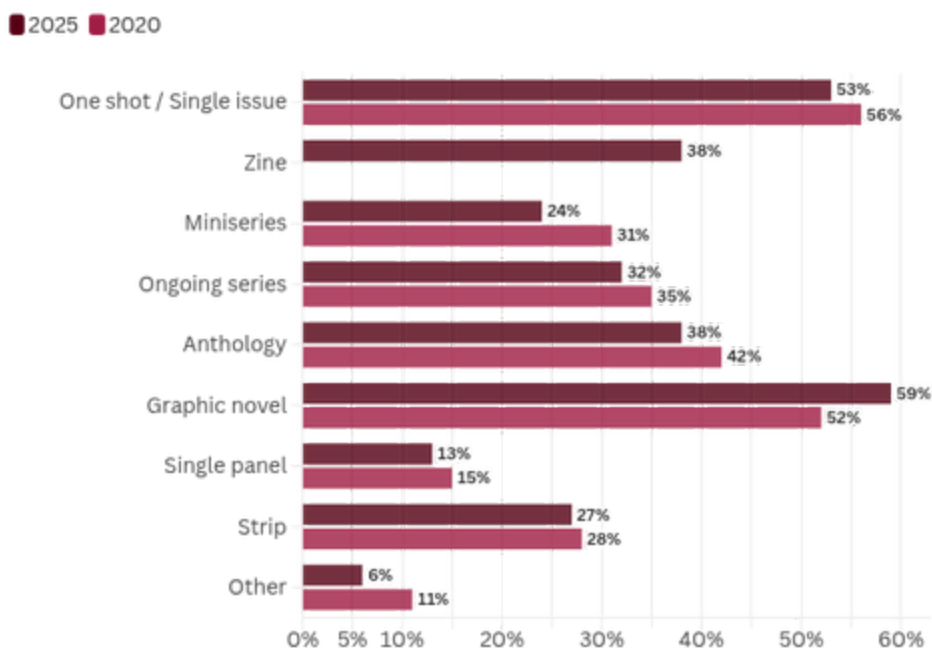
Who gets to 'make it' in which part of the industry is a question of general opportunities and accessibility, but also one of genre and audience. Commercial audiences are split by maturity level (Adult, Young Adult, Children), access modality (print, digital), and format (One Shot, Zine, Miniseries, Series, Anthology, Graphic Novel, Single Panel, Strip, Other). 88% of 2025 survey respondents create or work with formats intended for Adult audiences, 60% for Young Adults, and 27% for Children. This indicates a significant overlap between creators working across audiences based on maturity level.

Which audiences do you produce comics work for?



Base: 688 / 621

Which formats do you regularly work in?



N.b. 'zine' was not included as a separate category in 2020
Base: 688 / 619

However, several respondents who work on the more strictly adult-only side of this spectrum stated that they feel their niches are increasingly impinged upon. These influences come from both the larger comic industry and political factors, and affect not only content, but creators' ability to sell their work. For instance, the UK Online Safety Act, a policy not specifically aimed at comic creators, endangers revenue channels for **'fun, sexy or daring comics'** as **'credit card and online payment processors decide arbitrarily what is and is not acceptable to purchase'**. While these limitations do not constitute explicit governmental censorship, they do limit the freedom of expression for artists if they intend to sell their work. While there are some political decisions which affect the industry at large, such as rising material and postage costs due to Brexit and US tariffs, there are key policies at national level which affect some niches of the comic industry disproportionately.

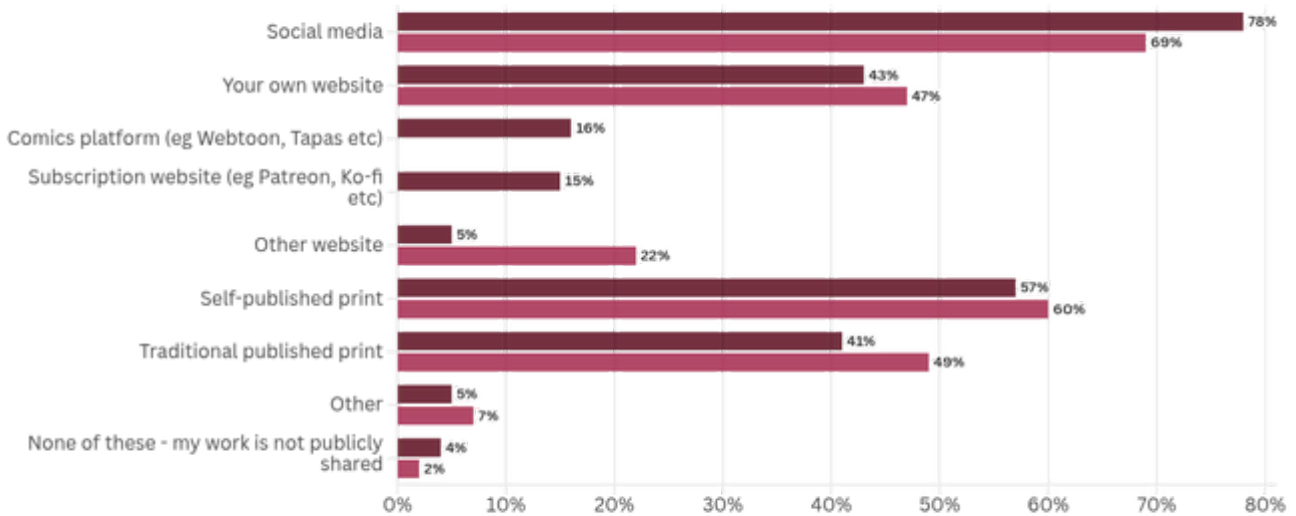
This applies irrespective of whether creators produce in print or online: payments are predominantly conducted online, so digital policies affect them irrespective of their publishing format. An increased reliance on digital spaces as a status quo - whether as a sole presence or an add-on - also affects how creators are expected to present themselves and their work. Social media use and web-based advertising are expected skills, even if a creator mainly sells prints. This goes hand-in-hand with a dissolution of clear delineations of responsibility for creators with multiple sources of income. In contrast to the relatively clear role responsibilities in traditional publishing where publishers take on the administrative burden of advertising, pricing, and distribution, multi-modal creators need to fulfil these jobs on top of their artistic work, and any additional work they may be doing to support themselves.

Even those who gain income from traditional publishing are affected by this: if 89% of these creators earn less than minimum annual wage from traditional publishing, they will have to juggle other jobs alongside this. As can be seen in other branches of publishing, social media-based self-advertising is becoming more and more of an expected norm, especially for up-and-coming creators.

“SOCIAL MEDIA IS AWASH WITH USERS AND IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO STAND OUT, UNLESS, PERHAPS, ONE WAS TO DEVOTE A LARGE AMOUNT OF THEIR DAY TO SELF-PROMOTION ONLINE - BUT THEN WHEN WOULD THE BOOKS THEMSELVES BE MADE?”

Where do audiences engage with your work?

■ 2025 ■ 2020



N.b. 'comics platform' and 'subscription website' were not included as separate categories in 2020 and would have fallen under 'other website'

Base: 687 / 621

The increase in social media promotion is visible: 78% of respondents use social media to share their work, by far surpassing the second most used option, self-published print, which 57% of respondents use. These two avenues of advertising paint a picture of print and digital presences sitting side-by-side, although this question allowed for multiple answers, which makes them not mutually exclusive. The third most popular avenue of promotion, personal websites, at 43% is closely followed by traditionally published print at 41% of respondents. Only a few used other websites (5%), other avenues (5%), or stated that they do not publicly share their work (4%).

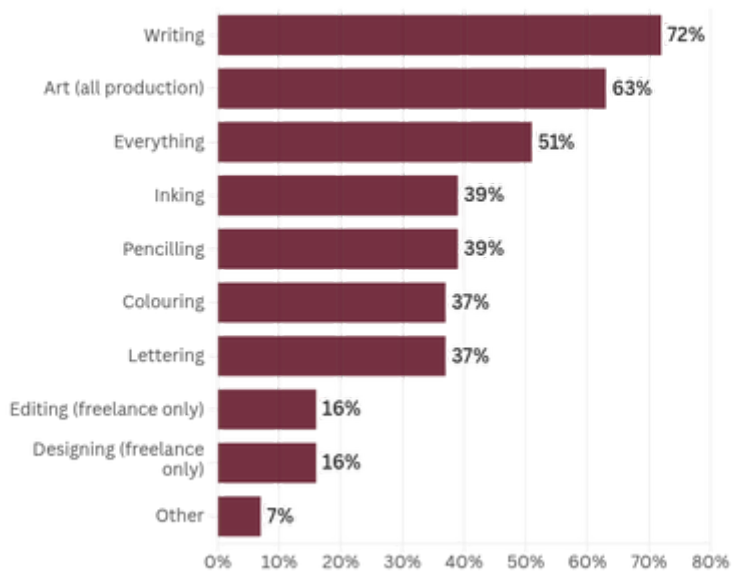
The 2020 survey saw a relatively large 'Other website' proportion (22%) when asking creators where they promote their work, with many respondents citing comics platforms and subscription websites as promotional avenues. These were included as separate categories in the 2025 survey, with comics platforms like Webtoon and Tapas being used by 16% of respondents, subscription websites like Patreon or Ko-fi by 15%, and other websites by 5%.

Worth noting is that while promotion on comics platforms has gone up, income generation from webcomics specifically has receded from 11% in 2020 to only 5% in 2025. This indicates that while creators put more work in, they earn less. Several respondents spoke frankly about their experiences with Webtoon in particular and the **'Webtoon grind'**, an **'assault on creators rights'** which has **'fostered a community of artists who are overworked, stressed and don't enjoy creating comics'**. There was concern that it was becoming harder for independent webcomics creators to gain an audience in a space **'dominated by predatory companies'**, who can **'monopolise and "enshittify" webcomics'**, though some felt more hopeful that **'there is the beginnings of a shift back towards the independent web again, and that people are rediscovering independent comics again outside of the Webtoon platform'**.

“THE COMICS INDUSTRY AND PUBLISHERS – AT LEAST FROM MY EXPERIENCE OF THE BRITISH AND ADULT/INDIE COMICS INDUSTRIES – DO NOT PAY NEARLY ENOUGH FOR THE TIME AND EFFORT WE CREATORS POUR IN.”

The burden of added promotion responsibilities also depends on creators’ roles within comic production. 72% of respondents are involved in writing, but for those who write exclusively, managing relationships and pay with art teams is an added layer to their craft, as is liaising with publishers on promotional narratives. Several respondents expressed that they felt success in comics increasingly relied on networking skills, rather than artistic skills.

Which of the following comic production activities are you involved in?



Base: 686

Out of necessity, most creators wear many hats: over half of 689 respondents (51%) stated that they are involved in all aspects of comic production, with 63% being involved in all aspects of art production within comics. Other skills, such as inking (39%), pencilling (39%), colouring (37%), and lettering (37%) show lower, yet consistent numbers, and with inking and colouring increasingly being carried out by a skilled sub-set of creators. It is worth noting that these income streams are predominantly open to established creators who have connections in the industry. ‘Established career’ creators make up 60.53% of those receiving an income from ‘regular work-for-hire’, with 22.12% having had a career for 5-10 years, 30.09% for 10-20 years, and 28.32% for over 20 years.

While other tasks across the comics industry show relatively even gender splits, ‘regular work-for-hire’, which pays relatively well, is predominantly carried out by male creators (60%; female: 23%, non-binary: 12%). Within this spectrum, freelance editing (16%) and designing (16%) are often supplementary choices to earn extra income.

Women (71%) and non-binary people (77%) are more likely to be in Art Production than men (58%), while men (75%) are marginally more likely to be writers than women (69%) and non-binary people (73%). However, while 65% of women do ‘everything’ in comic production, only 41% of male creators and 56% of non-binary creators cover all production roles. This indicates two things: firstly, men are more likely to shape the stories being told, but women and non-binary creators shape the way these stories look. Secondly, women are more likely to be ‘all-rounders’ - whether this is a choice or societal expectation is up for interpretation.

A key factor in this equation is social media: this is where most creators share and promote work, but also where many say they found their community in the first place. Being able to find people with similar, hyper-specific interests has helped foster niche comic culture, and enabled many of our respondents to break into comics. As an image-forward platform, it translates that Instagram is the primary choice of creators who use social media (85% in 2025, 79% in 2020). Tumblr use has gone down a little (18% in 2025) in comparison to 2020 (20%) and the generally extremely popular TikTok is only used by 4% of respondents. The dramatic shifts between 2020 and 2025, however, happened on two major platforms.

In 2020, Twitter was the most-used social media platform amongst comic creators (81%), which has fallen to a mere 17% in 2025. 50% of creators used Facebook in 2020, compared to 11% now. Both platforms underwent major rebrands in the past five years: Twitter became X in 2023, following Facebook’s 2021 transformation into Meta. However, these transitions are likely merely a byproduct of what drove comic creators to other platforms, not the root. For Facebook, this is an **‘ageing out’** of the platform, which is becoming increasingly inundated with AI-generated content, and for Twitter/X it is a political shift, as creators left en masse following owner Elon Musk’s support of Donald Trump and far-right political causes. This decision was not taken lightly: not only were creators forced to abandon the audiences they had spent years building, they also lost the **‘town square’** of the community, the disappearance of which **‘has left the comics world feeling more isolated’**.

“THE MUSK TAKEOVER OF TWITTER RUINED A LOT OF GOOD QUALITY NETWORKING CONNECTIONS AND MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES”

Some of this community has regrouped on Twitter/X's direct competitor Bluesky, which has risen to the second most-used platform (57%) for creators in 2025. This demonstrates that politics are central to a large portion of the comic community's shared identity, even if political opinions differ. Numerous respondents reflected on the comic industry as being marked by openness, and that the art form presented **'perfect vehicle for visual activism'**.

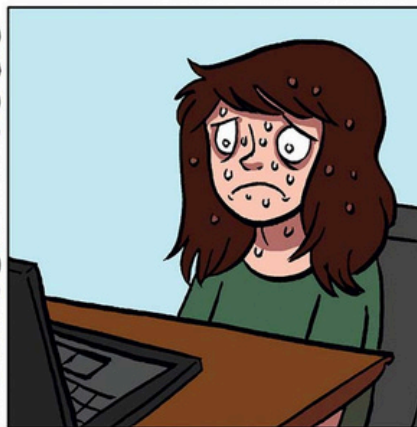
There is a notable gap in one area of the UK comics ecosystem in particular. As one respondent explained: **'there is a significant problem with comics journalism... as in there is less and less of it about. There are only a handful of places now (and they are disappearing at an alarming rate) where you can get comics news and reviews (especially for the indie scene). It's very difficult for your book to find its audience if nobody knows it exists'**. Where other areas of the arts have numerous outlets which can offer critical assessments of creative outputs and highlight notable works, comics is very limited in this regard, leaving creators **'struggling to find reviewers'**.

Respondents were keen to point out that they appreciated the **'excellent Broken Frontier website'** in particular, which tirelessly reviews indie comics and spotlights emerging talent through their annual 'Six Small Press Creators to Watch' showcase, but the reality is that this vital work is being carried out in vanishingly few places. Reviews and awards provide a clear path for outsiders to explore an artform by introducing them to works that are worthy of praise, and creators rely on these accolades to be able to progress in their careers. Without the journalistic and critical infrastructure to provide these insights and to reward merit in an otherwise uncelebrated industry, discoverability is down to word of mouth and the whim of social media algorithms.

"I WISH THERE WERE MORE JOURNALISTS REVIEWING GRAPHIC NOVELS. NOW THE OBSERVER HAS CHANGED HANDS THEIR COVERAGE HAS STOPPED - WHO WILL REVIEW MY NEXT ONE? AND, AS A READER, HOW DO I FIND OUT ABOUT GOOD NEW BOOKS TO READ? ALTHOUGH I'M ON A MAJOR MAINSTREAM PUBLISHER, I STILL NEED TO MARKET MYSELF AND WITH FEW MEDIA OUTLETS THIS IS A CHALLENGE."

Key Points

- Comic creators increasingly publish on online platforms, but are earning significantly less from webcomics than five years ago
- Creators are disadvantaged by the necessity of relying on social media for promotion
- There is a lack of comics criticism and journalism needed to reward creative merit and increase discoverability



© Rachael Smith

Cons for Pros

“ONE THING I DO LOVE ABOUT CONS IS THERE ALWAYS IS AN AUDIENCE FOR YOU AND YOUR WORK, AS WELL AS LOTS OF SUPPORT AMONG ESTABLISHED ARTISTS AND THE INDUSTRY NEWBIES.”

While the international comic community exists across diverse virtual and physical spaces, conventions (cons) are an essential part of its culture. In the UK, numerous festivals – from large-scale to indie – provide opportunities for comic creators, publishers, and fans to meet in person, network, and buy and sell comics. They are a core method of developing audiences outside of algorithmic curation and social media strategies, earning an income, and connecting with peers, and are a vital part of the comics ecosystem.

Events like the ReedPop MCM Comic Cons and Showmasters Film & Comic Cons in major cities attract tens of thousands of people, blending comics with film, gaming, and cosplay culture, while other more indie festivals are focussed on comics. These range in scale from the largest – such as the Lakes International Comic Arts Festival (LICAF) and Thought Bubble Festival with hundred of exhibitors and guests and thousands of visitors – to regional festivals and pop-up zine fairs.

While some do well at the bigger mainstream cons, many creators feel the emphasis on film and pop culture leaves comics **‘shoved into a corner’** as an afterthought, and prefer the independent comics-focussed events. However, several respondents stated that in the past five years indie festivals have become increasingly sparse, pulling more focus to these larger-scale conventions, and increasing competition for representation. For independent artists, attendance involves significant upfront costs, including table fees, travel, accommodation, printing, merchandise production, and materials costs. For many, that is not a financial risk worth taking, especially when they are already struggling to keep afloat.

“THE COST OF PRINTING, PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND TABLE FEES MEANS THAT ATTENDING THESE EVENTS USUALLY RESULTS IN A LOSS, I’M NOT IN A POSITION WHERE I CAN AFFORD TO TAKE FINANCIAL RISKS LIKE THAT.”

Simultaneously, increased prices for audience tickets, accommodation, and travel means visitors are less likely to buy from exhibitors. One respondent observed that **'people are far less likely to impulse purchase when they've had to spend £60-80 to even get into the market'**, highlighting that poor sales returns also reflect on the state of the economy at large. With the cost-of-living crisis affecting the UK at national level, fewer people are making large purchases. This is evident in several respondents' statements, who see merchandise as a more viable sales option compared to comics themselves: **'people are more keen to spend £2.50 on a sticker than £7+ on a comic issue'**.

25% of respondents stated that they receive income from merchandise, an increase from 23% in 2020. However, merch sales do not fix the existing problem of financial viability, and have ethical connotations, too. One respondent voiced reservations over **'participating in our overly-consuming culture by pumping more stuff to buy into the market when as a global economy we need to reduce carbon emissions and waste'**. This echoes a larger issue regarding the sustainability of cons and the comic industry at large: environmental awareness is a tremendous factor in people's choices, both long-term and on the spot.

46.3% of respondents stated that they are 'knowledgeable about the environmental impacts' of their comics production and 'always make sustainable choices'. While 29.5% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, only 11.6% responded negatively. These numbers indicate a clear commitment to sustainable choices amongst comics creators. This becomes even more apparent when creators are asked about their practice, rather than their knowledge.

61.7% of respondents stated that if they are aware of them, they will always choose sustainable options for their comics production, with 21.1% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 4.9% disagreeing. That means when creators are made aware, they choose sustainable options. The gap between the 46.3% who are knowledgeable about sustainable options and the 61.7% who would always choose sustainable options if they were aware is thus a knowledge gap.

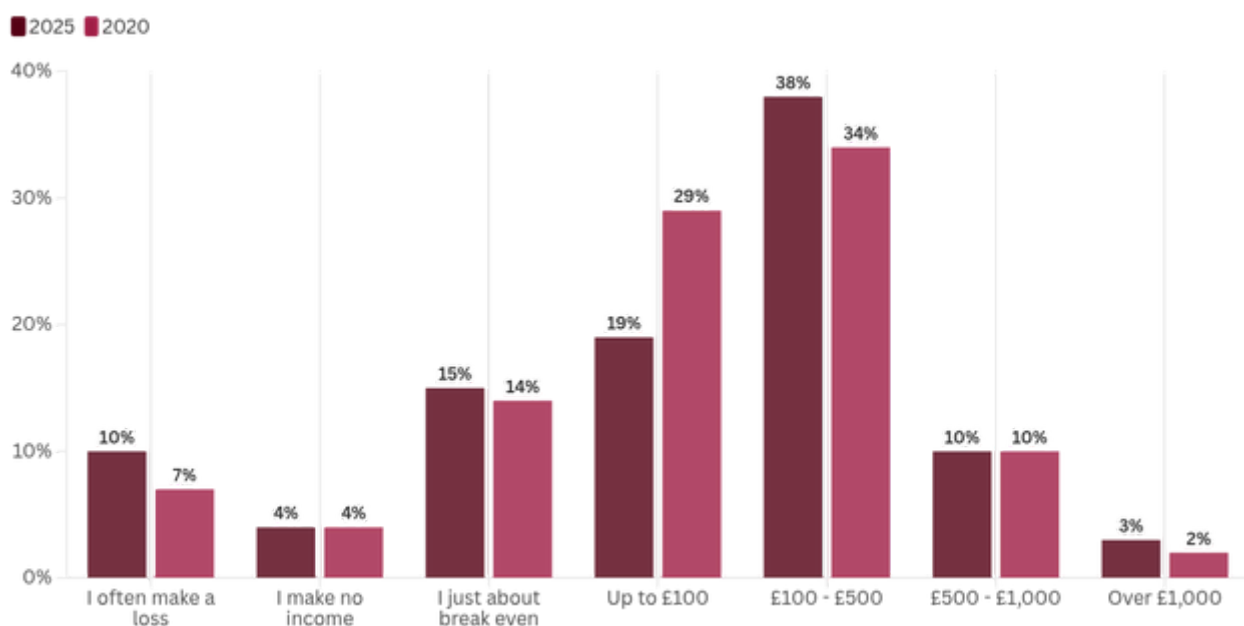
However, it also must be acknowledged that not everyone can afford sustainable means. 76.4% of respondents state they would choose sustainable options for their comics production 'if they can', indicating that it is not always a possibility, whether because of monetary constraints, or circumstances beyond their control. 10% were neutral on this point, and only 1.6% stated they would not choose sustainable options if they had the choice, showing that the vast majority of creators support sustainable sector practice.

Only 14.8% of respondents stating that ‘environmental impacts are not a particular consideration’ for them ‘in decision making about’ their ‘comics production’ indicates that this is not an area many creators feel indifferent about, either. However, whether this translates into more sustainable choices – in relation to merch, cons, or general comics production – is a different question. Commercial viability competes with sustainability considerations. Even for those willing to produce more merch, this does not necessarily mean attending cons is worth the time and effort, and without attendance, they also lose access to vital networking opportunities and community-building.

“I USED TO ENJOY SELLING AT EVENTS BUT HAD A FEW WHERE I ONLY SOLD A COUPLE OF STICKERS THE WHOLE TIME. I THINK THE ISSUE WAS COST AND THAT THE PEOPLE ATTENDING THE EVENTS COULDN’T AFFORD TO BUY PRINTS.”

These issues are exacerbated by location: fewer indie festivals means further travel for many creators, which incurs often unsupportable costs, **‘making it near impossible to make a profit at small to mid-size events’**, turning **‘a lot of conventions’** into **‘net losses’**. This does not apply across the board: 9.55% of creators attending cons between 2020 and 2025 stated they made ‘between £500 and £1000’ per event, while 37.61% made ‘between £100 and £500’, 19.4% made ‘up to £100’, and 14.63% broke even. This is in relation to production costs and table fees, not considering accommodation, travel, or work hours. On either end of the spectrum are 2.99% of respondents who earned ‘over £1000’, and 10.15% who made a loss at cons. Overall, cons present a less appealing marketing option for creators than they did in previous years.

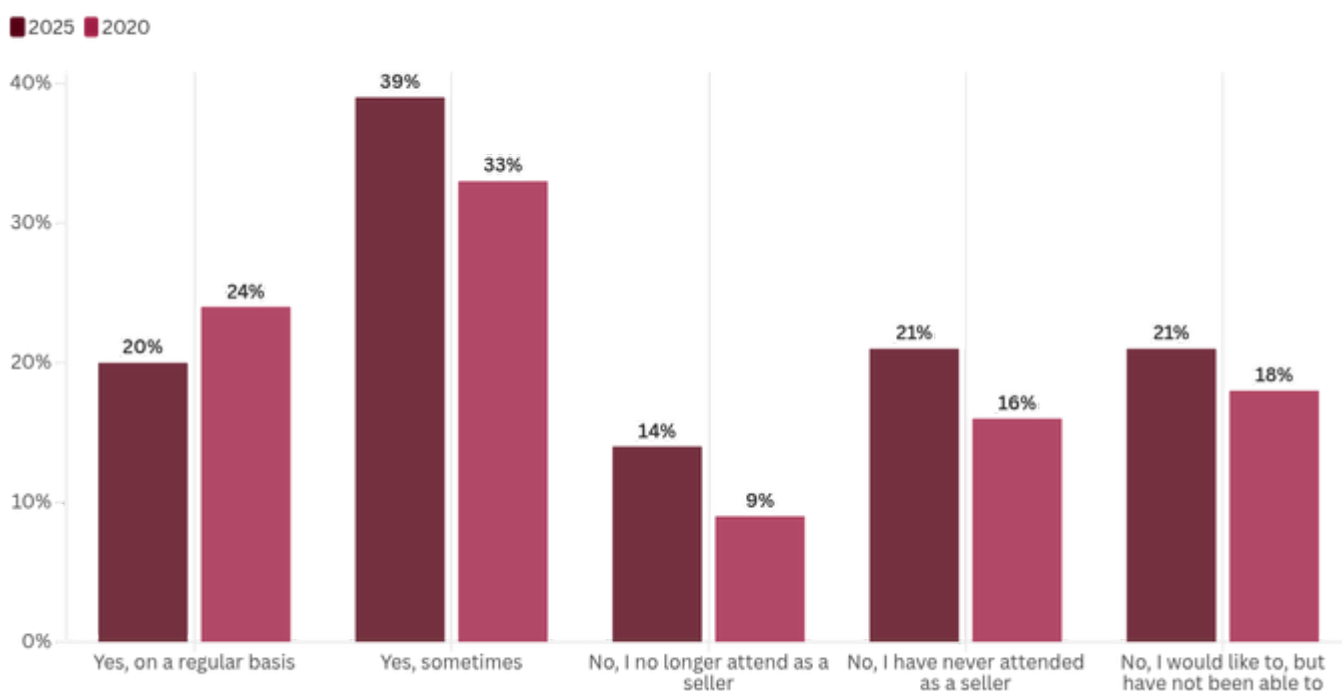
On average, what income does exhibiting at festivals/conventions generate per day (after costs)?



Base: 328 / 332

Regardless of these concerns, a majority of our respondents (59%) do attend cons or festivals either on a regular basis (20%) or occasionally (39%). 14% stated they no longer attend as a seller, and 21% of respondents never have. There are 21%, however, who would like to attend cons and festivals, but are not able to. Key factors are caring responsibilities, health issues, and disabilities, which exacerbate existing financial and time-related challenges for specific groups within the UK comic community. Several respondents stated that without financial support, like a Micro Bursary from Thought Bubble, they would not have been able to attend the festival.

Do you attend comic festivals / conventions as a seller?



Base: 663 / 618

Financial concerns only build one part of the increasing reluctance around cons: networking opportunities and confidence were other concerns highlighted by survey respondents. While festivals are commonly framed as networking opportunities, attending sellers have limited time to network meaningfully because they must remain at their tables to recoup costs through sales.

Confidence and anxiety intersect strongly in these environments: emerging creators feel pressure to appear professionally established, while those with only a single publication, for instance, question whether attending is financially worthwhile despite the potential long-term relational value. Meeting hundreds of people does not suit everyone's disposition, and analogously to creators feeling that social media skills are determining success over artistic skills, cons favour those who feel comfortable presenting their work and building networks.

One way around this is online comic fairs, which have become increasingly popular as an alternative means of reaching audiences following the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortbox championed the format in the UK with an annual, month-long digital-only fair featuring curated indie comics from creators around the world. What these events lack in networking opportunities they more than make up for in accessibility and reach, earning participants a significant income without the risk, expense or social expectations of in-person events and introducing them to new readers worldwide.

In the context of many smaller UK festivals and fairs closing down in the past five years, there is an opportunity to diversify, engage local comic communities, and increase accessibility by institutionally supporting micro-to-medium scale events, and reducing the competitive ethos which has taken over larger festivals. These events are often - somewhat heroically - planned and directed by comics creators themselves, usually in a voluntary or low-paid capacity, and with minimal prior experience of event planning.

Support systems for more locally-oriented or specialised events may reduce pressure on creators to attend large-scale events, and make attending them more financially viable. The challenge is to shift cons and festivals away from being bottle necks and towards being the welcoming gateways into the industry which they were designed to be.

Key Points

- Comic cons/festivals/fairs are valuable for career progression, reaching new audiences and generating income
- Smaller festivals disappearing has made larger cons bottlenecks
- Many cons are not financially viable for smaller sellers or emerging creators

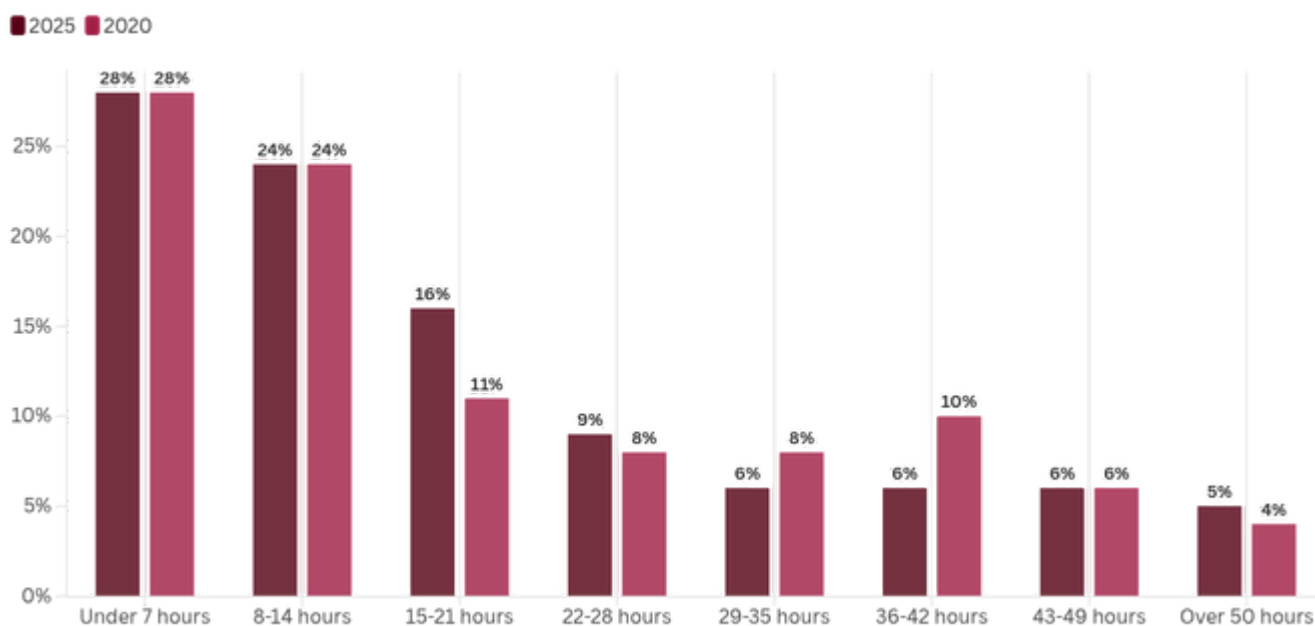
Universally Challenged

“IF COMICS PAID A REAL LIVING WAGE, ALL MY WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FINANCIAL ISSUES WOULD BE SOLVED.”

For 64% of survey respondents, comic production is not their primary occupation, and yet, it plays a significant role in their identity. Considering 83.3% of all respondents stated that they either have or want a career in comics, this number is notably high. 72% of the ‘non-primary occupation’ respondents only produce comics in their ‘spare’ time while for 28% of them, comics are a secondary occupation. Yet 72% of all survey respondents spend 8 hours or more on comic production every week, meaning that even for hobbyists, this is a rather involved pastime. This makes sense, given how much practice and dedication comic production involves. 24% of respondents spend 8-14 hours a week on comic production, 16% spend 15-21 hours, 9% spend 22-28 hours, 6% spend 29-35 hours, 6% spend 36-42 hours, 6% spend 43-49 hours, and 5% spend over 50 hours on comic production each week.

A notable difference to the 2020 survey is that those working 36-42 hours - a full-time employment range - has gone from 10% in 2020 to 6% in 2025, while the percentage of respondents working 15-21 hours per week - a part-time employment range - has risen from 11% in 2020 to 16% in 2025. This corroborates anecdotal statements from respondents who reported that it is harder to make a living from comics work, resulting in more creators resorting to multiple sources of income (within and outside of comics) and multiple roles.

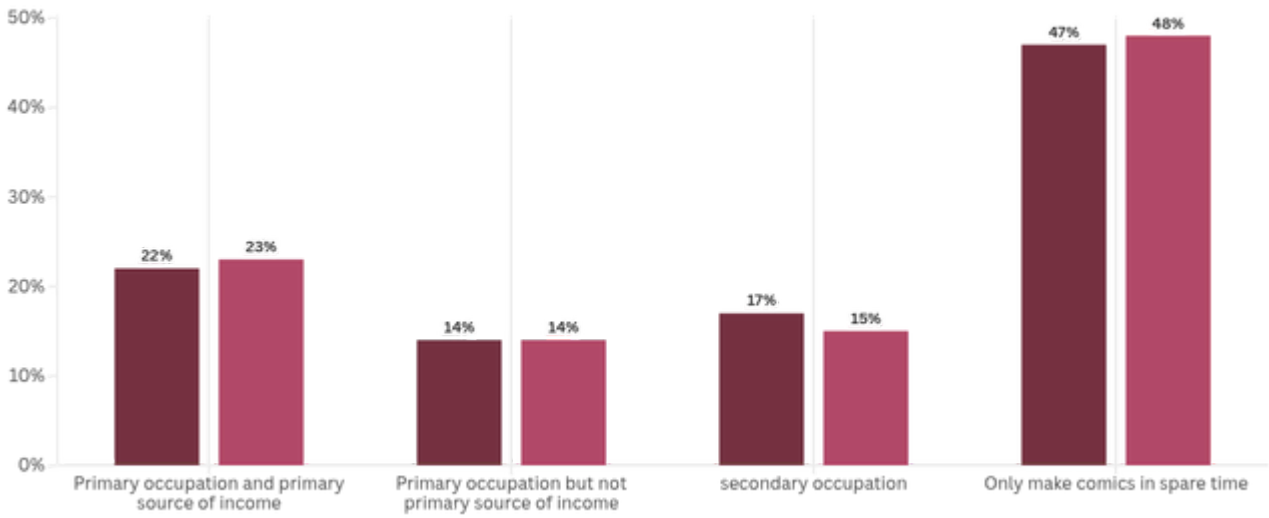
On average, approximately how many hours per week do you spend on comic production?



Base: 686/ 620

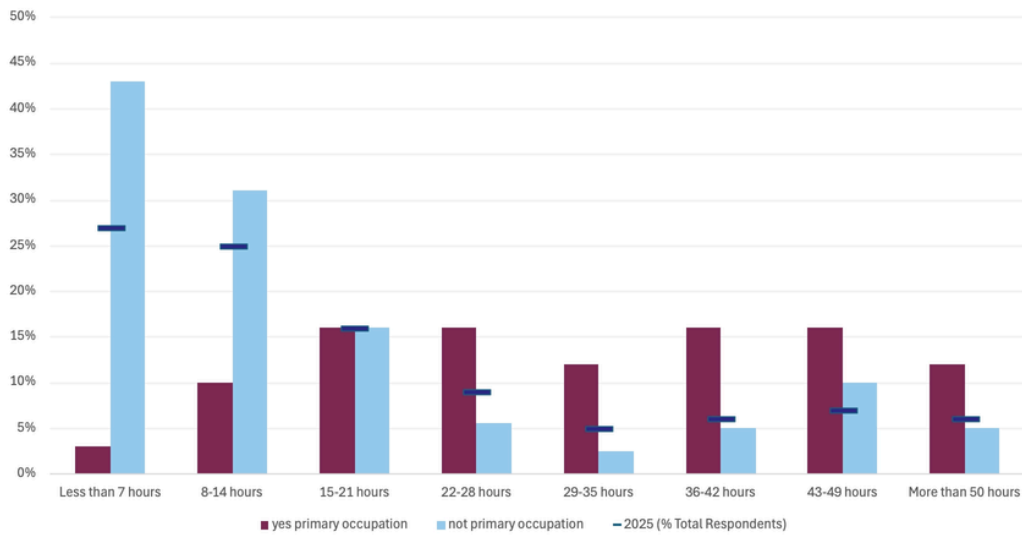
Occupation status

■ 2025 ■ 2020

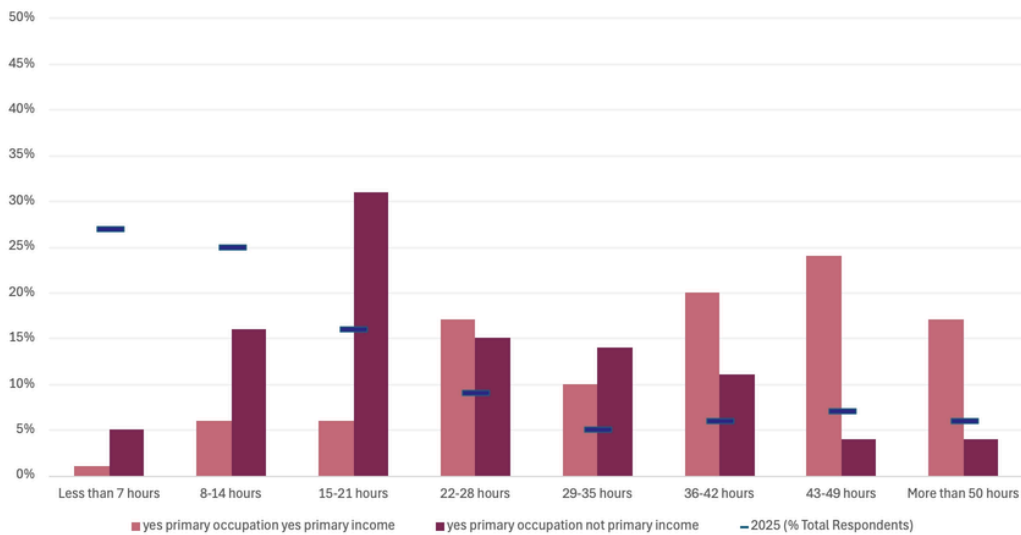


Base: 686/ 620

Hours Per Week - Primary Occupation Y/N

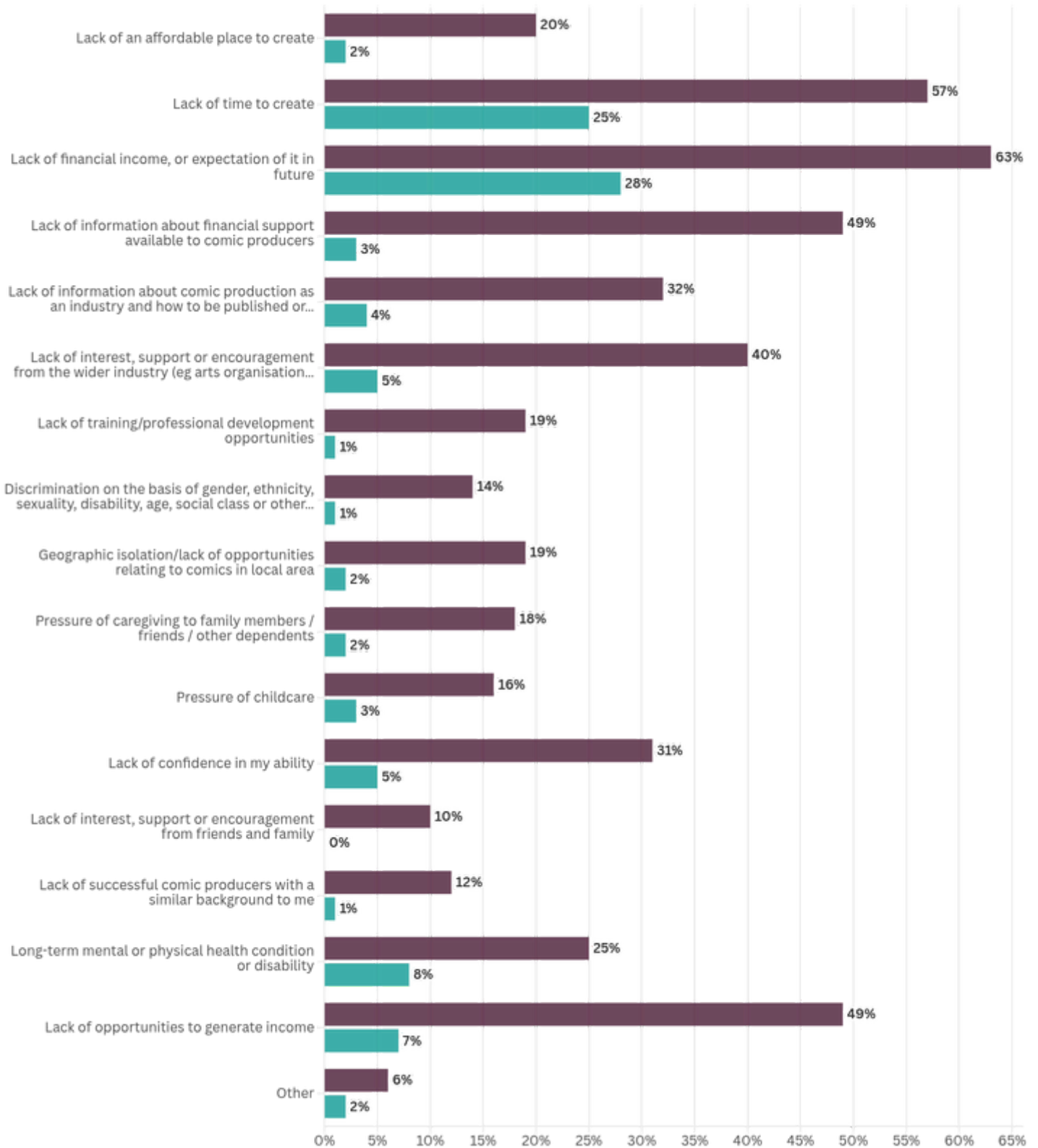


Hours Per Week - Primary Occupation Y/N



In terms of your comic production, what are the key challenges you face?

■ All respondents - all challenges ■ All respondents - main challenge



Base: 628

Of those whose primary career is in comics (35% of respondents), 59% receive their primary income from comics. 39% have alternative sources of primary income, which is a significant percentage given that 83.3% of respondents state to either have or desire a career in comics. This does not presuppose that said career has to be only in comics, but based on qualitative survey responses, that is the long-term goal of the vast majority of creators. Not being able to sustain themselves is a major strain on respondents: 63% cited 'lack of financial income, or expectation of it in the future' as the main challenge to their career progress. With rising costs in materials, rent, and general cost of living, creators are struggling against ever-increasing odds. They are getting paid less for longer work hours, and have to juggle their comic work with other jobs in order to sustain themselves. Especially over sustained stretches of time, this takes a significant mental and physical toll on their wellbeing. Many respondents wrote frankly about considering leaving comics altogether.

"BASIC INCOME FOR ARTISTS WOULD GO A LONG, LONG WAY."

57% of creators named 'lack of time to create' as a key challenge: juggling multiple jobs and responsibilities, on top of added administrative tasks, self-promotion, and other revenue-related tasks, time to create is cut short. An additional burden is navigating a limited set of options when it comes to earning money from comics work, with 49% of respondents reporting a 'lack of opportunities to generate income'. This necessarily leads to gaps which people need to bridge with alternative income, and 49% of creators cite 'lack of information about financial support available to comic producers' as a major hurdle. Without access to support structures, creators have to spend additional time and resources to find solutions, further adding to the already overwhelming additional task load.

The comics world seems to exist in something of a silo, technically part of the cultural sector, between visual arts and literature, but somehow separate and distinct and not fully accepted by either. This is reflected in the 40% of creators who struggle with 'lack of interest, support or encouragement from the wider industry, eg arts organisations, agents, venues'. It is a constant frustration for creators to see the opportunities, resources and support available to other types of artists that are denied to comics due to **'snobbery and exclusion'**. A number of respondents voiced their disappointment at this lack of acceptance, wishing comics were better respected and more integrated in existing arts and cultural arenas.

For creators looking to get into comics professionally, breaking in also presents as an obstacle. 32% of respondents cited a 'lack of information about comic production as an industry and how to be published or produced' as challenges they had faced. This underlines a lack of training resources and places to find this information, especially for creators who may not be able to follow a traditional publishing or promotion path.

31% of respondents listed their own lack of confidence in their ability as a major challenge. This intersects with people's reluctance to attend festivals and cons when they do not feel experienced enough, or putting their work onto a social media platform. This lack of confidence may be connected to the dearth of time to work and finesse their craft. Practice grows confidence, and without it, creators find it even harder to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, self-promote, and network.

It is worth noting that this presented an obstacle to more creators than long-term mental or physical health conditions (25%) - which is not to say that the two cannot coincide. But confidence-building and supportive engagement with the wider arts world are essential factors to address issues of overwork, poor mental health, and general feelings of hopelessness towards a career in comics.

A 'lack of training/professional development opportunities' (19%) also plays into this, as do 'geographic isolation/lack of opportunities in local area' (19%) and a scarcity of affordable places to create (20%). These point towards missing community hubs, physical spaces to go to, to learn and build rapport and work on one's craft, not just in major metropolises, but across the country.

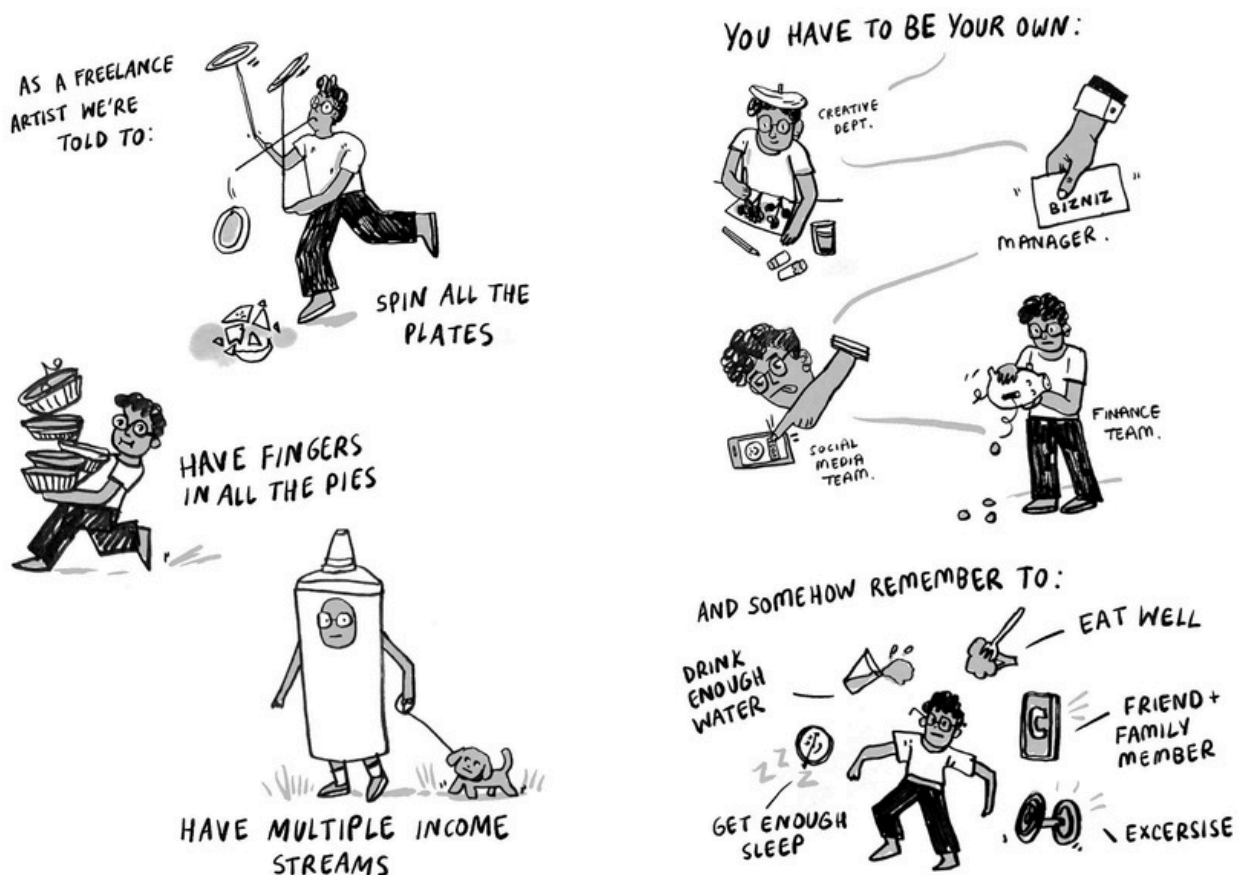
For 18% of respondents, pressures of caregiving to family members, friends, community, or other dependents pose a major challenge, with women (24.1%) being marginally more likely to be affected than men (16%) or non-binary people (11.4%). Pressure of childcare negatively affects 16% of creators, with men being more likely to struggle with this (19.1%) than women (15.7%) or non-binary people (6.3%). 'Discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, age, social class or other personal identification, and/or fear of that discrimination' presented significant obstacles to 14% of creators, signalling a marginalisation which is also represented in success stories. 12% of respondents cited the fact that 'comic producers with a similar background to me' were not finding success as a challenge.

This brings together three key points: confidence, community support, and marginalisation. Without skills training to build confidence, community support at accessible conventions, and structures which foster diverse perspectives, people, and comics, this plethora of intersecting challenges is hard to overcome.

In the next section, we will take a closer look at the key challenges which shape the background against which the comic industry's struggles sit, and underline why comic creators are particularly affected by these challenges.

Key Points

- Comic creators feel sidelined by the wider arts world
- Comic creators struggle with accumulative challenges around income, time, costs, and community support
- Over sustained periods of time, these challenges present serious mental health risks, which can lead to creators leaving the industry altogether



© Aleesha Nandhra

THE CURRENT ISSUES

This section outlines key challenges which people working in the UK comic industry face. Drawing on statements from survey respondents, this section seeks to highlight how larger issues present in the UK, such as the cost of living crisis, a lack of support structures, the reverberations of Brexit, and the rise of AI affect people in the comic industry. While these challenges are not unique to this industry, they affect comic professionals in particularly detrimental ways due to a lack of support systems and legislative protection.

Cost of Living Crisis

**“WORKING PAYS THE BILLS BUT WRITING FEEDS THE SOUL.
THE SOUL IS GOING HUNGRY.”**

There is a particular kind of exhaustion which runs through creators’ responses to the cost of living crisis, which impacts all aspects of their lives. Most respondents love comics deeply, but due to rising costs of living and decreasing job opportunities and rates, many are increasingly forced to choose between work in their chosen profession or work which pays enough to survive. The cost of living crisis is cyclical: consumers are spending less, publishers are tightening budgets, creators are getting paid less. This motion is quietly hollowing out the conditions needed for the comics industry to sustain itself, let alone grow. Paradoxically, this environment coincides with a time in which comics are getting more mainstream attention and appreciation than they have had in decades. Yet, for many comic creators, this increased cultural popularity does not translate to financial stability.

Traditional publishers are feeling the squeeze: budgets are tighter, and tighter budgets make risk-taking harder to justify. **'Anecdotally, I think publishers are being more cautious'**, one creator noted. Several reported that this decreased spending has led to more competition for getting published and less of a risk appetite, making it **'harder to pitch new and fresh ideas'**. The rates offered by publishers do not reflect the rising prices of everything else: one creator noted that a cover art rate of £270, set in 2013, remained the same in 2025. Page rates tell the same story: another respondent got paid £120 per page in 2003, but now only earns £95 per page on their best paid jobs, **'if I am lucky'**. Normally, they get paid £70 per page or less for the same amount of time investment and twenty more years of skill.

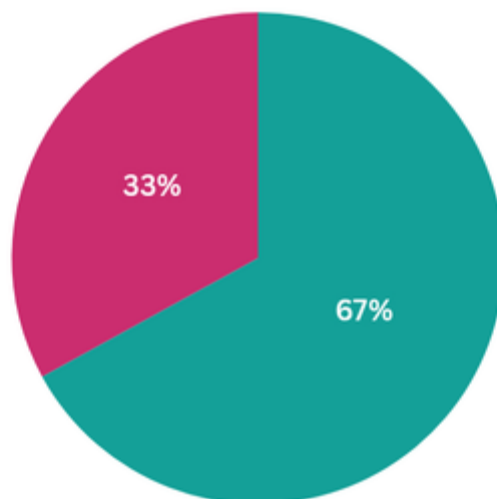
With rates stagnant and commissions declining, most creators have no choice but to seek other employment — working solely in comics becomes a privilege. This comes at a cost which does not show up in anyone's accounts: it exacerbates underlying mental health concerns which have plagued the industry, namely overworking and burn out. By needing to work in unrelated jobs, creators **'have less time and brain space to make comics'**, and when they do, they are expected to do so under shorter deadlines and for less pay. Those who cannot sustain the balancing act have made harder and harder choices. One creator described having to skip meals to feed their children while managing the constant financial anxiety of a household where two adults work in the arts. As a result, who gets to succeed in the comic industry is less dependent on talent, tenacity, or practice, and more on who can afford to submit their work.

These circumstances are creating holes in portfolios, too. Because rates are decreasing, many are turning down low-paying comic commissions, opting instead for non-comic work to pay the bills: **'when bills are so high, letting go of more stable forms of work in order to have a go at comics work that may not generate income feels very difficult'**. Several respondents described returning to full-time employment after years of working in comics.

Some creators are more affected than others. Respondents move away from cities, where they **'would have more art opportunities'**, because comics work cannot cover urban rental costs. Disabled creators, in particular, feel the drain of fighting to get by, and of the added admin and the extra work: **'I'm also disabled so every second lost is like an hour to me'**. Those with caring responsibilities or dependents (33%) need to ensure that their households, not just themselves, have the means to eat, live, and survive. Collectively, sub-groups of creators who are more affected than the general industry make up a significant portion of the diversity, quality, and creativity of the sector. By making it impossible for them to participate, the industry loses valuable talent and perspectives.

Do you have any dependents and/or caring responsibilities?

■ Yes, I have dependents and/or caring responsibilities ■ No, I don't have dependents and/or caring responsibilities



Base: 594

In light of traditional publishing opportunities becoming more competitive and less lucrative, many survey respondents favour self-publishing. While this route offers more creative control, it also involves significant amounts of extra work and, crucially, costs, requires all of the risk to be borne by the creators themselves. Self-publishing in a nation-wide cost of living crisis is its own particular trap. Print costs, materials, and postage have all increased, with some reporting such costs to have doubled or even tripled in the past years.

This is not restricted to physical prints: digital platform fees have climbed while seller margins have shrunk. One creator documented their online shop fees rising from £14 in October 2019 to £44 in October 2024. If a product costs £50, which is on the higher end of what a single output may cost, that is not profitable, especially considering that postage, material, printing, and time costs are not covered in this fee.

Crowdfunding campaigns, once seen by many creators as a lifeline for independent comics, are feeling the pressure too: rising production and postage costs push asking prices up, right when backers have less expendable income to spend. Each campaign **'feels harder and more tiring, and at some point...it starts to feel not worth the effort'**. Many creators reported losing patrons on Patreon and Ko-Fi, with no one to replace them. Simultaneously, it is harder to gain new supporters: competing for attention online feels like **'shouting into the wind'** for many creators, and in-person events have become fewer and harder to attend.

Festivals and cons have the potential of counteracting online-whelm: this is where independent comic creators should find their people, be able to sell directly, make connections, and form the kinds of bonds no algorithm can replicate. However, the cost of living crisis has taken its toll: while costs of attendance and materials have risen, returns have not kept pace. This is in part due to table fees, accommodation, and transport costs rising, but also because the audience has less to spend: **'people came and read my work and showed their appreciation, but they would prefer to follow my social media or buy some postcards'**. Con-goers, themselves navigating cost of living pressures, are spending more carefully and more conservatively – favouring prints and pins over comics, because **'these aren't a "gamble" like a comic is, they immediately know if they like them or not, and with much more limited funds people are taking less of a gamble on an indie comic'**.

This caution ripples through the remote reader side of the cycle too. With less disposable income and greater financial anxiety, spending on comics has become harder to justify: **'books and comics are a luxury item for many'**. Audiences are prioritising food and essentials. Those who do spend are doing so more carefully, gravitating toward the established and the guaranteed: **'people are noticeably less willing to spend money on comics that they are not familiar with'**. Further, audiences with increased pressures and responsibilities in this time of financial hardship are more likely to **'focus on the tried and tested big trad published books and a lot less on indie titles'**. As a result, independent and emerging creators are hit hardest. One creator captured this bind neatly: **'Now it costs £4-5 per comic. The average adult comic reader spends maybe £15 weekly on comics if lucky, which means only 3 single issues a week. In the midst of so many titles..., it's hard to find my place in that market'**. When readers have less to spend, they spend it on what they already know, which tends to not be the work of emerging or independent creators, further exacerbating the pressures on indie publishing.

The squeeze reaches into collaborative work too, with the cost of bringing in collaborators rising alongside everything else. **'I never begrudge collaborators raising their rates, as they have bills to pay. However, it has caused production costs to rocket, and have a knock-on effect on sale price, value etc.'**, one respondent described, noting that **'there's a limit to how much people are willing to pay for a single issue'**.

"THE DAY I STOPPED BOTHERING TO PROMOTE MY ONLINE SHOP WAS WHEN THE COST OF SHIPPING THREE COMICS, WAS WITHIN £1 OF WHAT I CHARGED FOR THE COMICS THEMSELVES."

For writers who depend on artists, colourists, and letterers to realise their work, and vice versa, the financial constraints of collaboration become increasingly challenging. **‘As someone who primarily writes comics’,** one respondent stated, **‘it’s also difficult to find funding to actually hire artists for projects ... as it stands my only real opportunity to work with artists is if they’re willing to work with me on a short form project for free (submitting to a publisher or competition or anthology) or if I’m able to pay them via a Kickstarter’.** The ambition to make something longer, more collaborative, to take the kind of risk the industry needs, requires money that, for most, is simply not there.

The money that does circulate moves towards the already-known, the already-established, the already-safe. And, the conditions that might produce the next generation of distinctive, original comics work – time, financial stability, willingness and ability to experiment – become harder and harder to foster. This is the quiet cultural cost which financial statements alone cannot capture: an industry becoming more homogenous under pressure, at a moment when its cultural reach is expanding. New readers are arriving, but the people best positioned to speak to these new audiences, the independent voices and risk-takers, are the ones with the least structural support to keep going.

“EVERYONE IS JUST TRYING TO SURVIVE.”



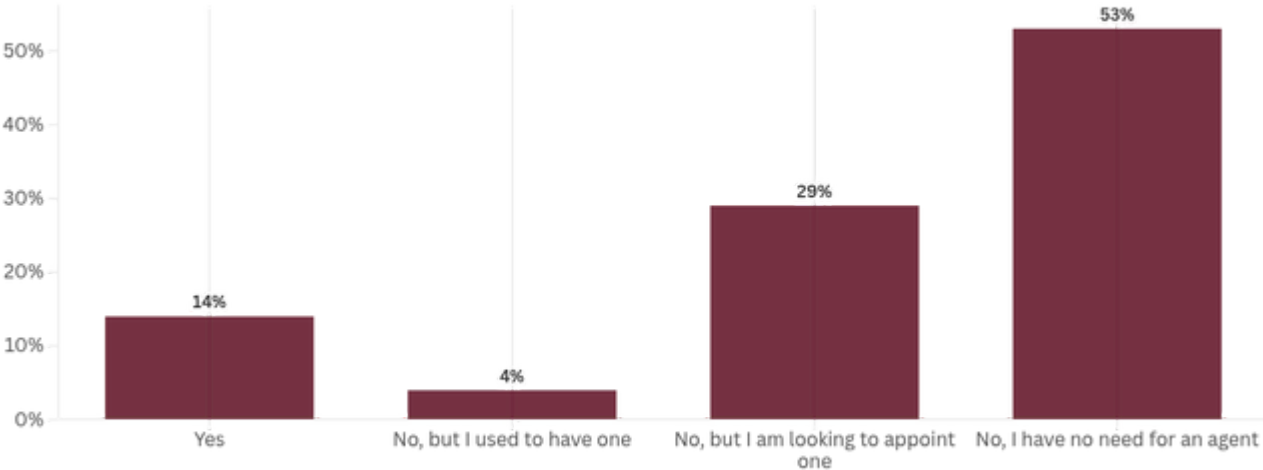
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Infrastructure and Support

“IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING, IT WOULD BE TO HAVE AN ORGANISATION THAT SUPPORTS NEW CREATORS”

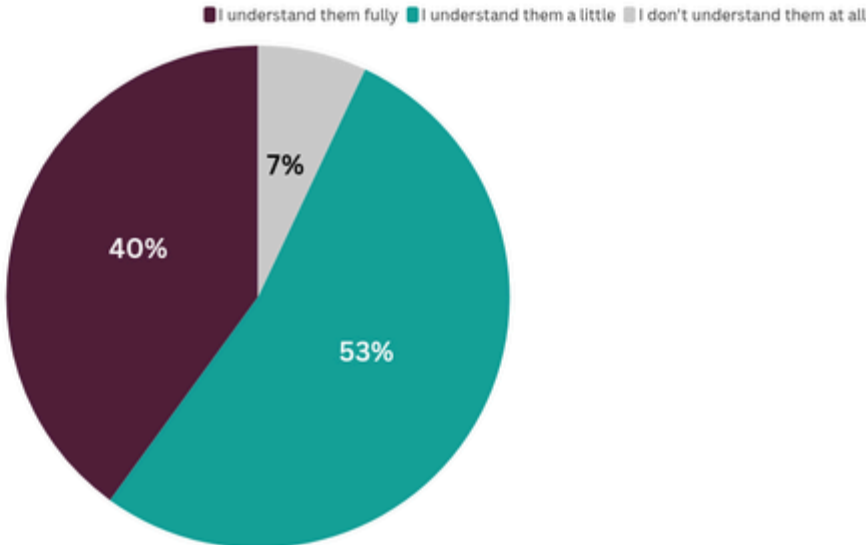
Comics occupy a peculiar position in the UK economy: they are a medium with growing cultural reach, yet little institutional scaffolding to sustain it. Where film, television, and music benefit from dedicated funding bodies, professional organisations and tax relief schemes, comic creators largely navigate a landscape built for and by themselves.

Do you have an agent for your comics work?



Base: 653

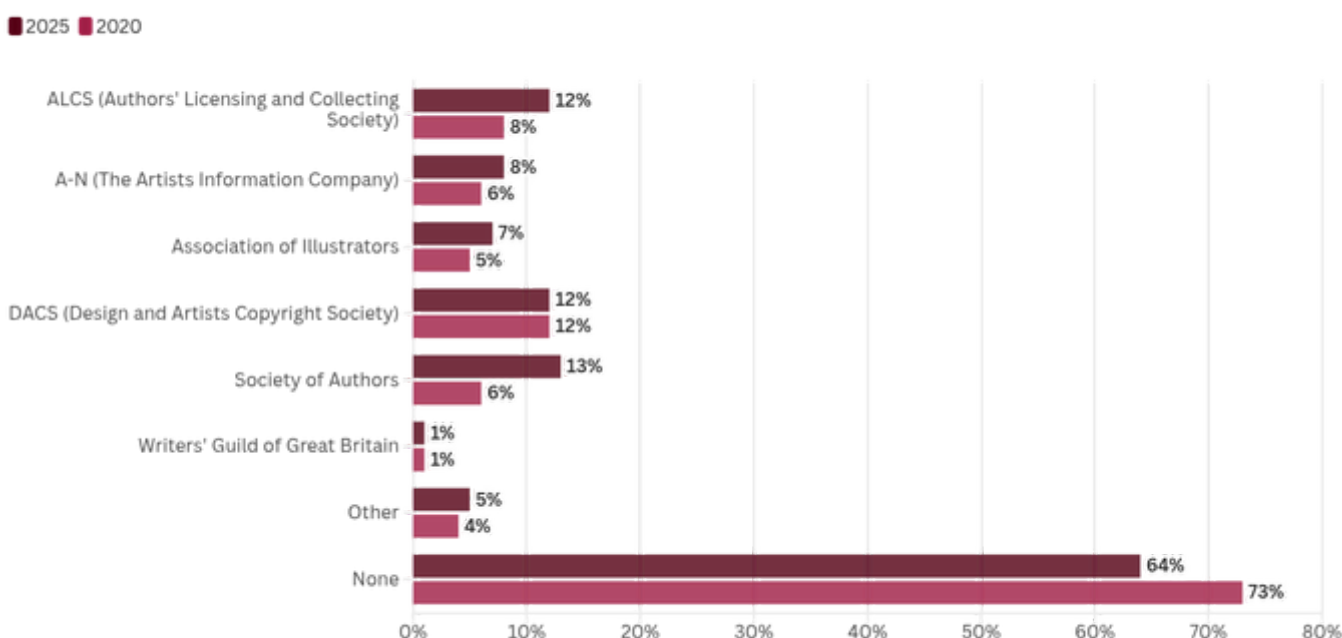
To what extent do you understand what your intellectual property rights and moral rights are with regards to your work?



Base: 658

Only 14% of respondents currently have an agent for their comics work, with 29% looking to appoint one, and over half (53%) stating they have no need for one. This includes amateur as well as professional respondents. Yet, only 47% of respondents say they feel confident in their ability to negotiate terms for the distribution of their work, and only 40% state that they fully understand the intellectual property rights which apply to their work. While 53% of respondents stated that they understand copyright IP 'a little', this still leaves a large portion of creators to fend for themselves without formalised support or a thorough understanding of the ramifications. While it is entirely possible for one person to take on the roles of agent, social media manager, and publisher on top of being a comic creator, it is a collection of added burdens that is distributed across several roles in traditional publishing formats.

In relation to your comics production, which professional bodies are you a member of?



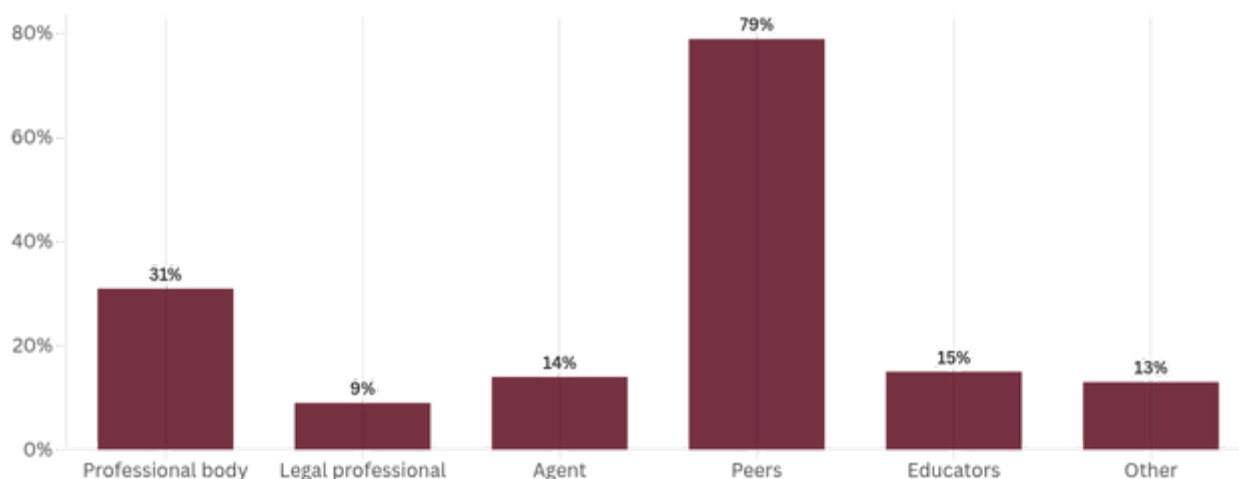
Base: 663 / 618

There are several professional bodies for whom comics creators may be eligible for membership which could provide a number of benefits. The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) and the Design & Artists Copyright Society (DACs) are two collecting societies which distribute money to authors and artists each year for registered published written and/or artistic works, while the Association of Illustrators (AOI), Society of Authors (SoA) and Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) provide advice on all aspects of the profession, including clause-by-clause contracts vetting and industry guidance, and offer networking opportunities. All of these groups campaign and some negotiate on behalf of their members. Notable steps have been taken towards greater inclusion in recent years, such as the formation of the Comics Creators Network by the Society of Authors as a professional support network and pressure group to advocate for creators' rights, which has led to membership more than doubling since 2020.

That so few comics creators are members despite potential eligibility speaks to the siloed nature of the industry: of the 689 respondents to this survey only 84 were members of the SoA; 47 of the AOI; 80 of ALCS; 80 of DACS; and 7 of the WGGB. When asked who they turn to for professional advice, only 31% of creators go to professional bodies while 79% seek help from their peers.

Given that a large portion of the community is stretched across multiple roles, income streams, and survival strategies, it is hardly surprising professional membership schemes - particularly those who at first glance don't seem relevant to comics creators - may be low on the priority list. This disconnect underlines that besides creating new support structures, there is also potential for existing systems to be made more visible, accessible, and targeted towards creators.

Where do you go for professional advice?



Base: 653

That comics require specialised infrastructure is an issue that underpins many of the struggles creators are experiencing. The dearth of such organisations has deep roots: the architecture of public arts funding in the UK was built in an era when comics were considered beneath its notice. While poetry societies, opera houses, and theatre companies were being formalised into artistic infrastructures, eventually cementing themselves as the Arts Council's portfolio organisations, no equivalent body existed for comics until very recently. Portfolio status is significant because of what it provides. Each of the devolved Arts Councils provide a regular funding programme for arts organisations, museums, and libraries across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with those selected receiving multi-year core investments to sustain their ongoing initiatives⁷. This covers running costs for premises, wages, and utilities, freeing organisations to focus on their outputs rather than perpetual fundraising.

Established arts bodies with paid development staff can dedicate resources to funding applications in a way that newer or less formalised organisations simply cannot. In the 2023–26 funding round alone, 990 arts and culture organisations across England will share a total of £446 million⁹. Of those, only one is a comics organisation: the Lakes International Comic Arts Festival (LICAF). As a National Portfolio Organisation, LICAF currently receives £238,306 annually from Arts Council England¹⁰, which is spent on the annual festival alongside numerous outreach and engagement projects, particularly around comics in education, as well as showcasing UK talent on an international stage. This funding for one festival, however, is 0.05% of the total NPO funding pot, and represents the entirety of sustained core public investment in comics as an art form in England.

Every other comic creator, festival, publisher, or community group seeking public funding must apply speculatively, for specific projects only, in addition to their regular work. Even major festivals like Thought Bubble must apply for discrete projects, rather than receiving sustained support. The sector, largely run on a voluntary or low-paid basis, is in effect being asked to compete on equal terms within a system built for and by organisations with paid fundraising staff, established networks, and decades of institutional experience.

This predicament is not lost on creators, with many unaware that comics creators, organisations or projects could even be eligible for such funding. Several expressed doubt that even if comics were technically eligible they wouldn't lose out due to funders' preferences for **'establishment'** artforms. This fear of internal bias is not entirely unfounded, with one respondent commenting that **'we applied to the Arts Council of Great Britain [the body which preceded the devolved Arts Councils] and were told, and I quote, 'Comics are not an art form'.**

The levels of awareness and acceptance of comics seems to vary greatly between countries. Discussions with Arts Council England over the last two years have helped to raise awareness of comics as a worthy but underfunded artform. In response, ACE have taken steps towards greater inclusion by formally classifying comics under its Literature funding strand, and forming an internal working group to better understand underlying issues within the sector. Respondents who were aware of these developments – notably those few who had applied for funding and were more familiar with the process – were more optimistic about comics' place as an approved artform.

Respondents were in near universal agreement however that applying for funding from Arts Council England and Creative Scotland was a **'painful process'** that was **'labyrinthine'**, **'arduous'** and **'daunting'**. Additionally, application frameworks are calibrated for touring productions and public-facing events, mapping poorly onto the often solitary, iterative process of producing comics. Requirements around match funding and demonstrable audience reach disproportionately disadvantage sole traders, working class creators, and those without institutional affiliations. For comic creators, these barriers compound, and there are few support structures to make up the difference.

Creators felt somewhat more positive about Creative Scotland's Forward Fund, which involved a more manageable application process in which funds would go towards projects crowdfunded on Kickstarter. This scheme requires creators to already be doing the significant work of running campaigns to fund their creations, as well as carrying the risk of the project not being funded, but for those already committed to funding and distributing their work in this way, it can provide much-needed assistance.

Concerningly, no respondents reported having received funding from Arts Councils in Wales or Northern Ireland. A Welsh creator described trying to apply to Arts Council Wales and being passed on to Literature Wales, only to be told that they **'don't have a structure to support comics'**. Meanwhile a creator in Northern Ireland explained that accessing funding is **'very difficult, often tied to local politics and tends to go to 'usual suspects' every year'**. For creators to have such limited access to public funds in two of the four countries demonstrates the work needed to do to prove comics are a valid artform, worthy of support.

It is clear that a good deal of groundwork is needed before a more equitable share of funding can reach comic organisations and creatives. Of the 689 survey respondents, only 46 (6.7%) received financial support from public funding bodies, with 28 from Arts Council England and 12 from Creative Scotland.

A significant factor in the low uptake is perhaps that few are in a position to be able to apply: the knowledge, time, and capacity required to navigate funding processes are systematically unavailable to creators working in an already financially precarious field. Even for those who had awareness that such funding was available and that comics were eligible, the time required was a major obstacle, especially when the outcome is so uncertain.

“IT IS DAUNTING, AND I KNOW IT TAKES MORE TIME THAN I HAVE, AND I KNOW I NEED TO APPLY, BUT I HAVE A BOOK I ALSO NEED TO DRAW AND I NEED TO WORK ON MORE RELIABLE AND IMMEDIATE METHODS OF GETTING MONEY THROUGH THE DOOR.”

The difficulty was also compounded by other factors which comics creators are disproportionately affected by. Neurodivergence and disability make navigating the complex systems and fulfilling numerous requirements **'utterly inconceivable'**. The perceived elitism of funding bodies and the arts establishment coupled with the necessary unpaid free time to spend on application-writing also puts working class creators at a disadvantage.

“THERE ARE FAR, FAR TOO FEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKING CLASS ARTISTS IN PARTICULAR. THE TIME SINK INVOLVED IN RESEARCHING AND APPLYING FOR RELEVANT FUNDING IS SIMPLY NOT WORTH IT WHEN EVERY OPPORTUNITY IS SO COMPETITIVE AND I NEED TO BE CONSTANTLY ACTIVELY MAKING AND SELLING WORK JUST TO AVOID EVICTION.”

The overall benefits for those creators who did receive funding, however, were transformative. Respondents recounted being able to take time from regular employment in order to focus on their comics work, and a sense of purpose that was a **'major positive impact'**. Those who were successful felt very lucky to be so: **'I wish more comics creators had access to such funding'**.

Virtually every respondent to this survey is eligible to apply for public funding, yet many are unaware of it, intimidated by the process, or practically unable to engage with it. As well as supporting individual practise, increased public funding of community projects often applied for by smaller voluntary groups - festivals and conventions, in particular - would uplift the whole industry with a myriad of benefits, from increasing opportunities and developing audiences to encouraging peer-support networks and skill-sharing.

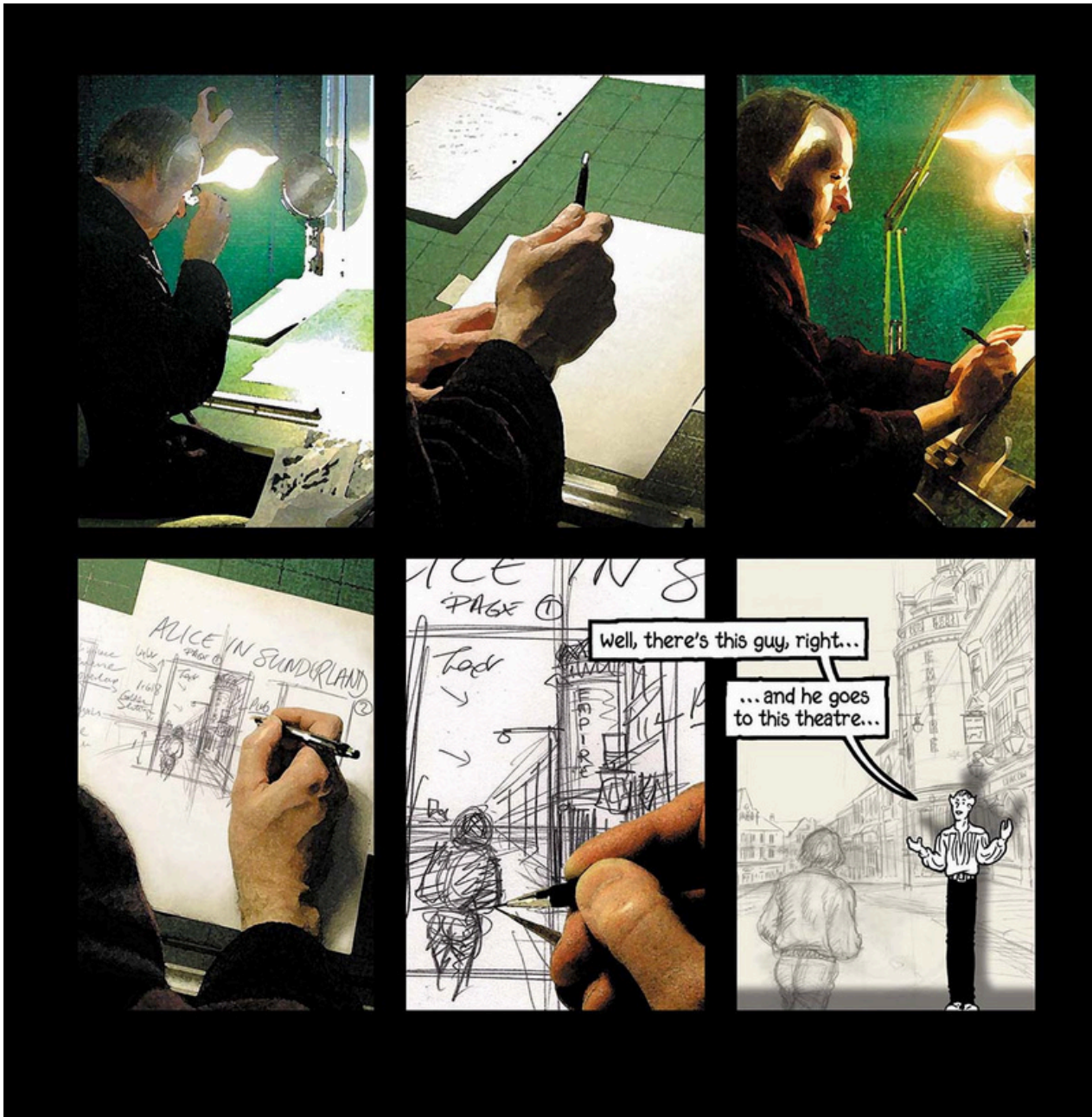
All of this would seem perfectly aligned with the Arts Councils' funding priorities. What appears to be holding many applications for such projects back is not the lack of justification for their existence, nor doubt as to the dedication of the people behind them, but ability to communicate this to funders. Numerous respondents were concerned that the apparent requirement for specialist knowledge was a significant barrier to entry, and that the whole system **'seems geared towards continuing funding those who are already in the know'**. As one respondent explained: **'I feel that arts funding is obstructive to those who have not had the advantage of further education in the arts or have friends and relatives established with that world'**.

Respondents outlined work done by The Comics Cultural Impact Collective (CCIC) to provide resources, workshops and one-to-one guidance to try to increase access to funding for comics creators and organisations as well as highlighting issues around inequitable access to arts councils and policymakers. This work is done on a voluntary basis, however, and is not sustainable as a long-term solution.

What infrastructure does exist for comics has been built largely through the sustained, frequently unpaid labour of community members: festival organisers, small press collectives, zine librarians, Discord moderators. Formal pathways into the profession are scarce, and where mentorship programmes or residencies exist, they do so in pockets dependent on individual commitment rather than sector-wide investment. Emerging creators, particularly those without existing networks, are left to navigate the industry through informal routes that are themselves often exclusionary.

The absence of any sector-wide pay standards such as agreed minimum terms compounds these gaps further. Unlike film, broadcasting, and other creative industries with negotiated rate cards and union agreements, comics lacks any equivalent mechanism by which creators can benchmark fair pay or enforce professional norms. Creative freelancers face the accumulative disadvantages of irregular income, limited professional development, and no institutional infrastructure to advocate on their behalf. Without dedicated funding streams, large-scale organisational support, and standards of pay and practice, the conditions needed to produce distinctive and diverse comics will continue to erode.

“WE NEED TO SUPPORT COMICS CREATORS AS A COUNTRY BECAUSE THERE’S HUGE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL IN THE INDUSTRY AND WE’RE NOT DOING ENOUGH TO REACH OUR POTENTIAL. PEOPLE BLOODY LOVE COMICS AND ARE WILLING TO SPEND MONEY ON THEM.”



© Bryan Talbot

Brexit and International Concerns

“WE ARE A POORER COUNTRY.”

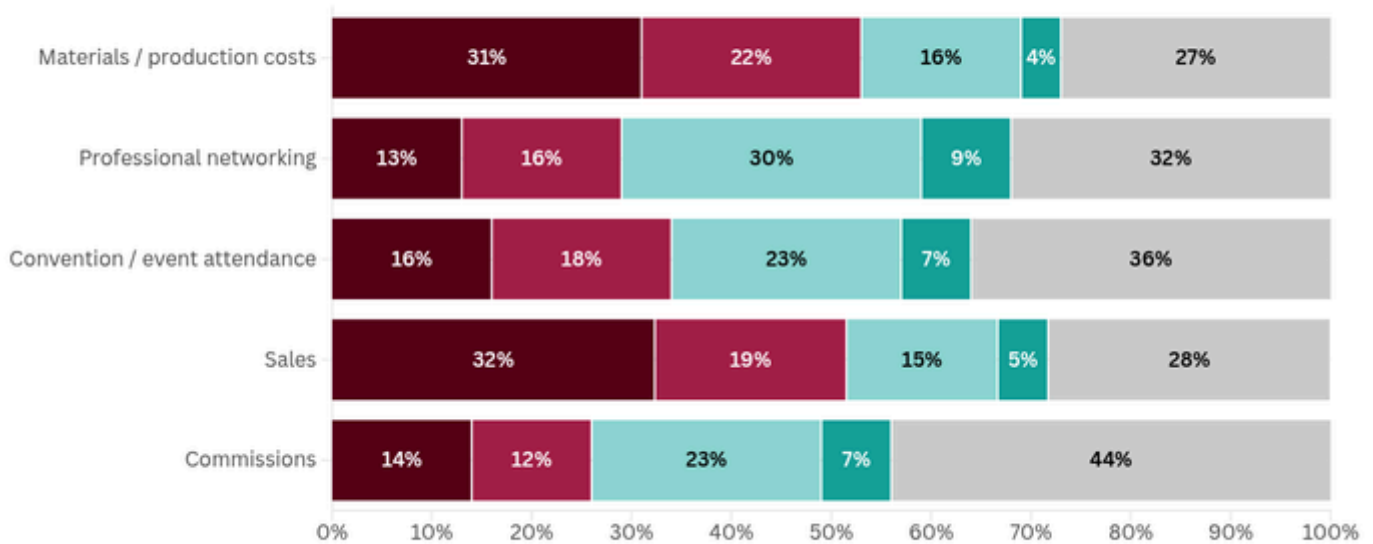
For those whose sales depended on international reach, rising shipping costs and tariffs are an additional challenge. Brexit coming into effect has impacted the previously frictionless trade with Europe. Creators describe shipping, customs, taxation, and compliance requirements as overwhelming, particularly for sole traders and small presses without administrative support or access to clear guidance, and on whom the financial ramifications of a small mistake could take a significant toll. From statements like **‘customs clearance is a nightmare’** to **‘materials now cost three times as much to import’**, the impacts of the UK leaving the EU are prominent in the comic industry. For several creators, this has effectively rendered certain international markets unviable to sell to, with one stating that keeping up with changing regulations is a time commitment they cannot afford. At a time when the cost of printing and decrease of rates have slimmed margins significantly, the added cost of increased international shipping has tipped the scales for many.

Respondents widely link Brexit to increased material costs, reduced profitability, and broader economic instability affecting both production and consumption. Several reported that their **‘sales to Europe have fallen considerably’**, they receive **‘fewer commissions from European customers’**, and that **‘international shipping costs pretty much killed international physical sales’**. One respondent pointed out that due to increased postage costs, they barely stood to earn £1 from the sale of a £40 graphic novel. US tariffs play a role in this too, having made another anglophone market much harder to access for UK comic creators. However, survey respondents were more concerned about the loss of access to French and Belgian comic economies: **‘We’re just over the channel from one of the world’s biggest comics markets, but there’s no connection.’**

Brexit has not just impacted sales and material costs, but also opportunities for UK comic creators in Europe. Respondents reported that the **‘legalities of working while in Europe are exponentially more complicated’**, with previously well-paid European teaching opportunities rendered unviable due to the **‘ludicrously long-winded and expensive work visa process’**, and that collaborations often failed due to visa issues. **‘Less contact and opportunity in Europe’** also means that fewer UK comic creators attend comic events outside the UK as sellers. **‘I feel cut off from other countries now’**, one respondent stated, echoing a feeling of isolation which many others expressed. There were some creators who perceived the impact of Brexit as limited on their careers, mainly due to alternative citizenships, domestic market focus, or career structures less dependent on European exchange. However, they, too, are affected by rising material costs and import taxes, which are a key marker of the post-Brexit UK economy.

To what extent do you feel that the following areas of your work in comics been affected by Brexit?

■ A lot ■ A little ■ Not noticeably ■ Not at all ■ Not applicable



Base: 555 / 555 / 551 / 549 / 559

As with the cost of living crisis, already overworked, multi-source income creators are affected the most. One respondent stated: **‘as a part time cartoonist, I cannot prioritise my online shop. I don't understand selling to Europe now, I don't understand the US tariffs. I cannot keep up with postage prices and rules’**. This additional labour was repeatedly called out by respondents as intensifying the mental load they have to manage on top of their professions.

Beyond material effects, many respondents describe Brexit as producing a cultural narrowing of the UK's creative environment. **‘Our opportunities and imaginations have been irreparably shrunk’**, one respondent stated, while another remarked that **‘an atmosphere of constant tension makes it exhausting for creatives’** to sustain their craft.

Together with the cost of living crisis, the reverberations of Brexit majorly contribute to respondents' financial concerns. This, in turn, pushes many creators into overwork and burnout, trying to juggle more work in an ever-shrinking arena. As a result, the cost of living crisis, Brexit and tariffs are directly linked to declining mental and physical health amongst creators. Community support becomes a vital antidote to an otherwise dire accumulation of pressures.

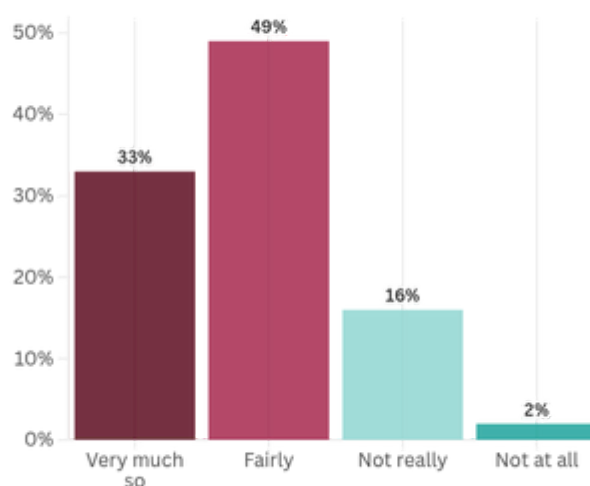
Inclusivity

“THE COMICS INDUSTRY IS A BAG OF CATS, WITH SOME LOVELY PEOPLE AND QUITE A FEW SHARP EDGES.”

The majority of respondents expressed their desire for **‘an inclusive, open, and communicative community’** - often from quite different perspectives and political standings. **‘Parity without tokenism’** and an **‘openness to diverse opinions’** were perceived as key to the comic industry’s longevity and financial sustainability. A prerequisite for this openness is to include newcomers: numerous ‘emerging career’ respondents described the UK comic community, both online and in person, as **‘clique-y’** and **‘not open to newcomers’**. Comics Youth CIC was cited as a good example of how these obstacles can be challenged, but some respondents stated that the **‘lack of support from fellow creators’** impacted their careers, confidence, and wellbeing.

Several respondents noted a difference between small press/self-publishing contexts in the UK, which are largely welcoming and inclusive, to more mainstream traditional publishing, which is perceived as more exclusionary. Some see a **‘boys club style hiring and firing system’** as a root cause of this discrepancy and view this not only as a detriment to those not in the club, but to the industry at large. By favouring what is familiar, rather than what is innovative, publications risk creative stagnation. One respondent described the **‘feudal system of cliques, sliding into DMs, friend recommendations, and exhausting self-promo’** as breeding **‘exploitation, abuse, and predation’**. The premise of a **‘secretive “deal-done-at-the-bar” system’** suggests that **‘established publishers/agents are more interested in guarding what they already have instead of actively cultivating new talent’**.

From your experience to what extent do you feel the UK comics sector is welcoming and inclusive?



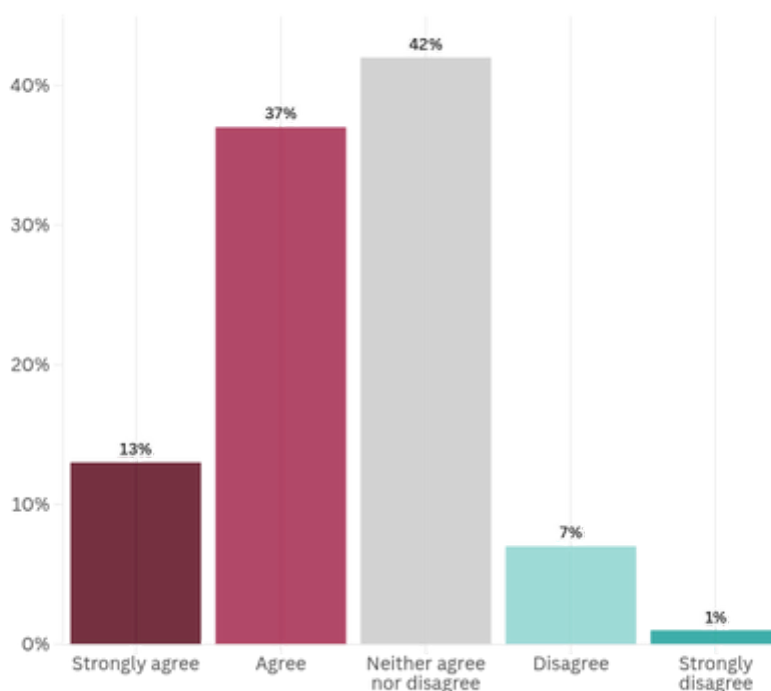
Base: 628

While some feel overlooked or not explicitly welcomed, others feel openly ostracised or discriminated against, with several respondents tying their lack of being taken seriously as a creator to their 'background'. 14% of creators cite discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, age, social class or other personal identification, and/or fear of that discrimination' as a key challenge. This affects female and disabled creators in particular, as well as Global Majority creators.

'Lack of successful comic producers with a similar background to me' was also a key challenge for significantly more Global Majority creators than respondents overall. It should be noted that while steps have been taken in recent years to ensure festival line-ups, panels, anthologies and exhibitions contain diverse participants, there are still occasions - particularly in more mainstream projects and events - where they can be entirely white and male.

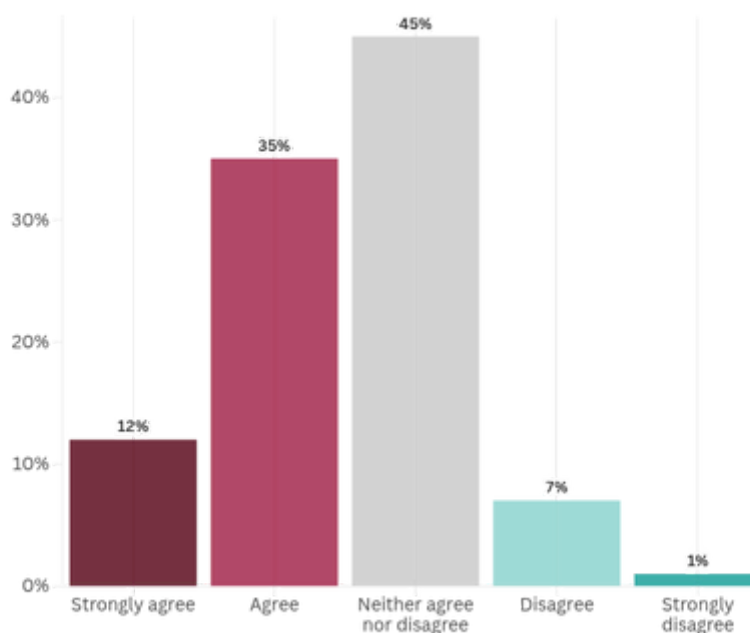
Discrimination towards disabled creators also manifests in the level of accessibility at cons and in-person events. The experience varies greatly from event to event, some ensuring both general and specific needs of attendees are met and publishing clear access information well in advance, others for whom such things are an afterthought. The size of the event means limited resources can be a hinderance: **'medium to small events don't list access information, so you have to search locations and venues to see if it's possible to table or even visit'**. However, many respondents felt that it was the smaller events which were more likely to be supportive: **'Generally I feel like comics fairs are pretty strongly on the more positive side of accessibility, inclusion etc. This may be because the kind of fairs I tabled at were more on the indie / alternative side of things, where there is generally heightened consideration'**.

Your access needs are met by comics festivals/conventions/events



Base: 651

Comics festivals / conventions / events provide enough information on accessibility for you to be able to attend



Base: 654

Choosing venues that are physically accessible and providing clear communication beforehand ensures that the responsibility remains with the organisers and is not put on attendees. Where needs are not met or sufficiently communicated, potential exhibitors are left to gamble on their ability to navigate the event at all. 47% of disabled creators agreed that their access needs were met by festivals, conventions and events, with 22% disagreeing. When asked if they felt these events provided enough information on accessibility to be able to attend, 49% agreed and 16% disagreed.

Comic cons and festivals can be crowded, confined, noisy and brightly-lit, all of which contribute to sensory overwhelm. Though these can be hard to prevent, many disabled and/or neurodivergent respondents were appreciative of efforts made by organisers, particularly Thought Bubble, to mitigate the difficulty with designated quiet areas and easy-to-follow signage. Many organisers also provide table cover if exhibitors need a break. Of note too was Sequential Scotland, which has 'remote stalls' from which creators who are unable to attend due to health issues or living too far away can sell their comics and zines.

With these events being central to the comics community, not being able to attend can leave creators feeling sidelined and isolated. With 25% of creators being disabled and 44% being neurodivergent, there is potential for those with access needs to be the majority of hopeful attendees. Accommodating these needs, therefore, is a vital part of planning and promotion, and resources must be allocated accordingly.

While there has been negative press towards supposed **'EDI hires'** in more mainstream US comics, the majority of survey respondents appreciated the introduction of **'new voices'**, arguing that **'reading the same story over and over is tiresome'**, and that they **'welcome fresh ideas and viewpoints'**. Many acknowledged that **'not everything was made for me, I am not the centre of the universe'** to underline that some people's bias towards perspectives they do not identify with should not sway the industry, as **'there are a million and one other comics'** to read instead.

Those who do not see themselves represented in mainstream comics underlined the importance of changing imagery around sexualising women and showing Global Majority characters as passive or subservient. Respondents highlighted the potential of comics as a visual, access-friendly medium to build part of this cultural language, yet noted significant barriers in getting these forays into traditionally published works. This disparity is particularly frustrating when creators get positive feedback and interest from audiences, but are not recognised by publishers. One respondent described that **'very soft and feminine'** narratives with a **'focus on emotional themes and character-driven plots'** constantly **'get pushed to the side'** in favour of more well-trodden comic territory. Additionally, success for these **'alternative'** narratives do not guarantee a **'seat at the table'**: one respondent remarked that after becoming a published author with sales successes, they still felt like they were **'back at square one, rather than progressing'** their career due to the industry being **'slow and picky'**.

Even though sexism in pay discrepancies were repeatedly acknowledged, some respondents noted improvements on these issues, with it feeling less like a 'men vs. women' divide in the past five years. Regardless, several respondents reported being continuously **'treated as a "woman in comics" or as any "person in a box"'**, with the insinuation that this labelling relegated them to, for instance, **'be in specialist anthologies and one-offs'**, and **'to mentor, rather than create'**.

These issues are exasperated by ageism: one respondent stated that despite her high-profile success in comics, being an **'older woman'** is **'an uphill battle'** in the industry, with peers and publishers not taking her as seriously as younger, male creators. Several respondents remarked on their disappointment with **'foundational comics professionals getting sick later in life and receiving no support from the companies that owe so much to them'**. The lack of financial safety nets for creators throughout their career extends to the advanced stages of people's careers.

Additionally, several respondents noted a lack of opportunities for older creators, as they are often **'overlooked and forgotten'** in favour of **'newer creators who will work for less'**. Partially due to being subject to age discrimination, older creators are more prone to depression and isolation. One respondent remarked on the difficulty of **'recognising one's own success is a product of over a decade of self-exploitation and overwork'**. The mental health issues which are putting strain on emerging creators to break into the industry affect established creators and those who started their careers later in life in different ways. Taking into account the accumulative pressures from years of financial insecurity and overwork, sustaining a life-long career in comics appears fundamentally at odds with maintaining one's mental wellbeing.

Health and Wellbeing

**“THERE’S NO WORK. THERE’S NO MONEY.
I’M ON THE VERGE OF GIVING UP.”**

A career in comics is, for many survey respondents, as emotionally meaningful as it is structurally unsustainable. Constant financial struggles produce exhaustion, anxiety, and chronic strain which affects many creators’ mental and physical wellbeing. With pay not changing, creators are required **‘to do more with less and work longer hours’**. **‘Deadlines seem to get more intense every year’**, pushing creators to their physical limits. Chronic issues like Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs), vision issues, chronic back pain, poor circulation, and fatigue are frequently experienced alongside mental challenges with anxiety, depression, burnout, and imposter syndrome. Confidence building and feedback build a crucial counterpoint to these stressors, but especially for creators on the fringes of the comic industry, it is difficult to find these spaces.

Some respondents stated that they were welcomed **‘depending on the extent to which their ‘inclusion serves others’**, leaving them feeling **‘deeply alienated from the majority of the UK comics industry’**. Aside from gender, age, ethnicity, and able-bodiedness factoring into the severity with which creators experience this alienation, class also plays a key role for creators who see themselves as outside of the industry ‘norm’. One respondent stated that they **‘can count the number of working class comic creators’** they **‘know on one hand, and they are all frustrated by the same issues of exclusion and financial burden’**.

They point out that even the opportunities which are created to improve inclusivity across the above mentioned categories, **‘those opportunities invariably select for more affluent, educated applicants’**, citing inaccessible file formats in application processes, or the added burden of having to navigate systems which **‘assume everyone owns a MacBook’**. However, differences in upbringing, education, and financial means do not necessarily affect who sees themselves as part of either side of this equation. 175 survey respondents self-described as working class, with various interpretations of what that term entails. A general consensus, regardless, was that working class creators are less likely to have financial cushions available to them from their family or friends, making it even harder to bridge gaps between commissions.

Despite these challenges, some creators view self-publishing as a potential way out of the commission-chasing cycle. One respondent stated that **'after working in the industry full-time for three years, I am burnt-out from working with limited and drab scripts/projects and am seeking to turn my self-publishing practice into a sustainable source of financial income'**. With the increasing popularity of self-publishing, however, also comes increased responsibility to self-manage all aspects of the publication process, from production pacing to promotion.

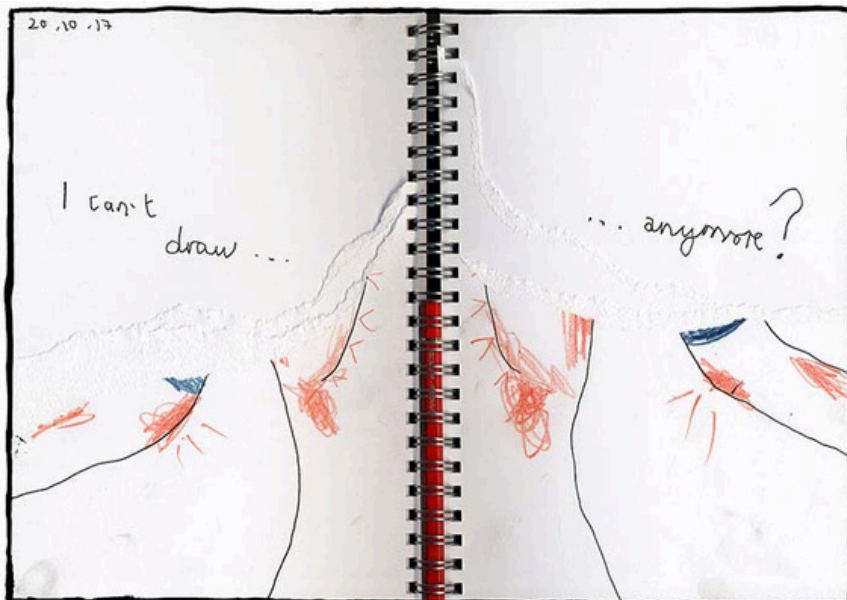
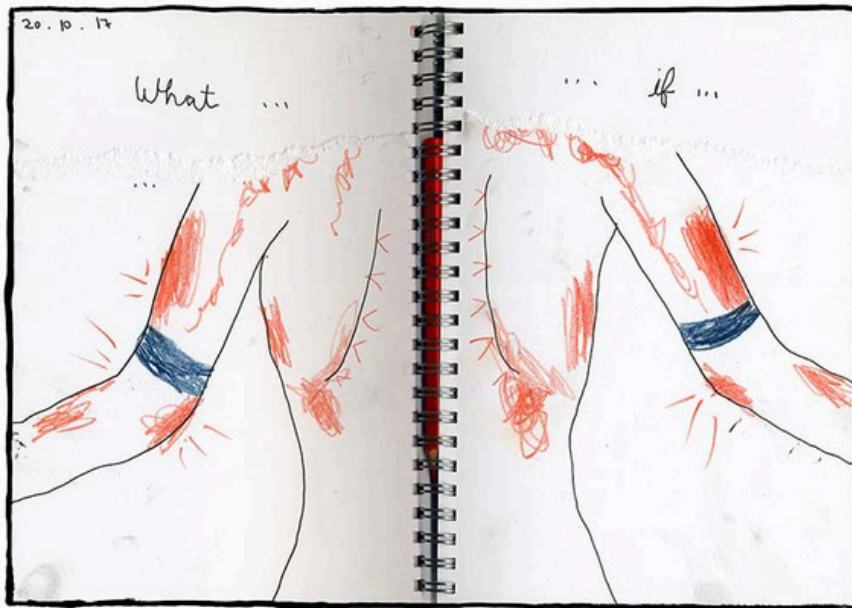
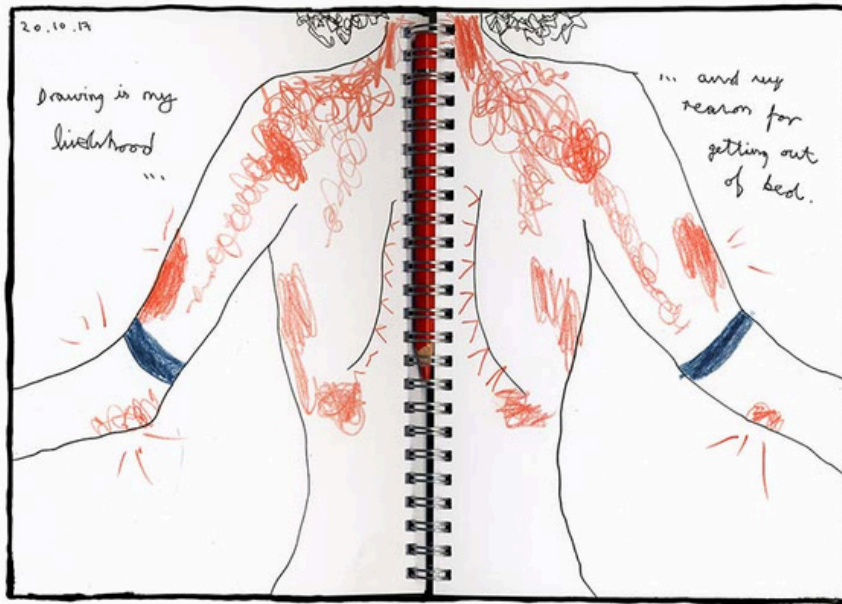
Feeling obliged to keep pace with competitors, several respondents articulated the pressure to produce work to a standard they were satisfied with while audiences' attention spans shrink with the over-saturation of content on social media and elsewhere, and while they agonise over **'detailed and complex illustrations'**, their audiences **'just get bored waiting for new issues, so they quit or forget about the comic'**. Waning interest from audiences presents an additional stressor to self-published and webcomics creators, leaving many feeling **'more unstable than ever'**.

These experiences suggest that the pressures comic creators face are neither temporary nor individualised. They are cumulative structural conditions with increasingly intensifying impacts. As financial precarity persists alongside increasing workloads, creators face a prolonged erosion of stability, wellbeing, and professional confidence. Without sustained institutional support and reliable income safety nets, mental health struggles are likely to compound across longer career trajectories, transforming short-term stress into chronic burnout.

Perpetual financial uncertainty, exclusionary industry practices, and the emotional labour required to remain visible and competitive, compound to an environment in which resilience is constantly demanded but rarely sourced. Addressing long-term creator wellbeing requires more than acknowledging the conditions which affect their mental and physical health. It necessitates rethinking the structural underpinnings which produce insecurity as the baseline of creative work.

What if?

by Paula Knight © 2017



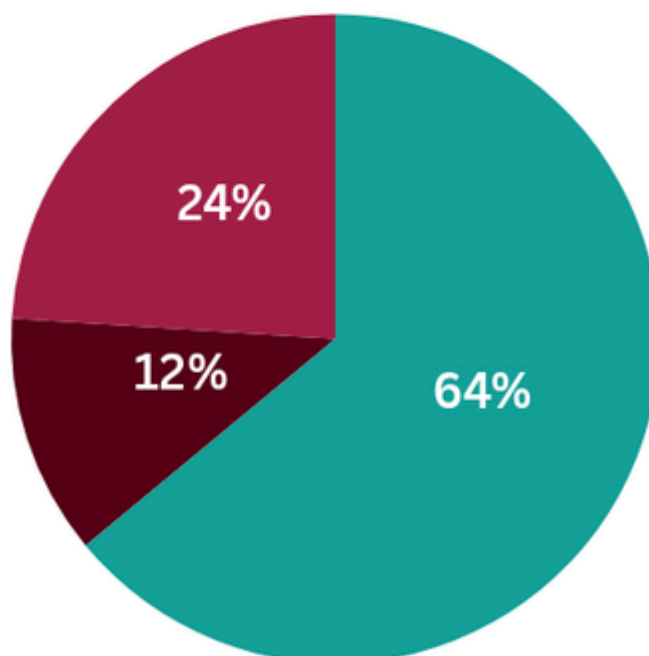
Artificial Intelligence

“ARTISTS ARE FINDING LESS AND LESS WORK AS COMPANIES THAT WOULD POSSIBLY PAY TO EMPLOY US ARE TURNING TO ENVIRONMENT-DESTROYING, UNETHICAL- AND QUITE FRANKLY, UNQUALIFIED - MACHINERY TO BLEND EXISTING WORK TOGETHER WITHOUT PAYING THE ARTISTS THEMSELVES ANY HEED.”

Overwhelmingly, comics creators are not using Generative AI (GenAI), but are disproportionately affected by it. 96% of respondents do not use it in their comics production. With only 4% of respondents using GenAI, comic creators report using it substantially less frequently than the average UK population, where about 28% of people reported using GenAI weekly in 2025¹⁴. Yet, despite this, nearly a third of the 626 respondents (36.42%) felt that they have lost work or income because of it - 24.44% suspecting as much, and 11.98% knowing for certain.

Have you lost work or income due to Generative AI?

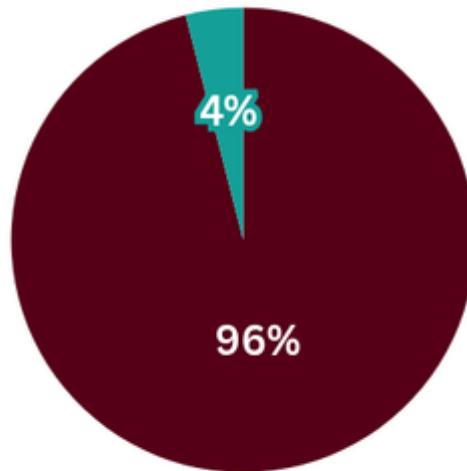
■ Yes, I know that I have ■ Yes, I suspect that I have ■ Not that I know of



Base: 626

Do you use Generative AI (i.e. LLMs like Chat GPT or image generators like Midjourney) in your comics production?

■ No, I don't use Generative AI ■ Yes, I use Generative AI

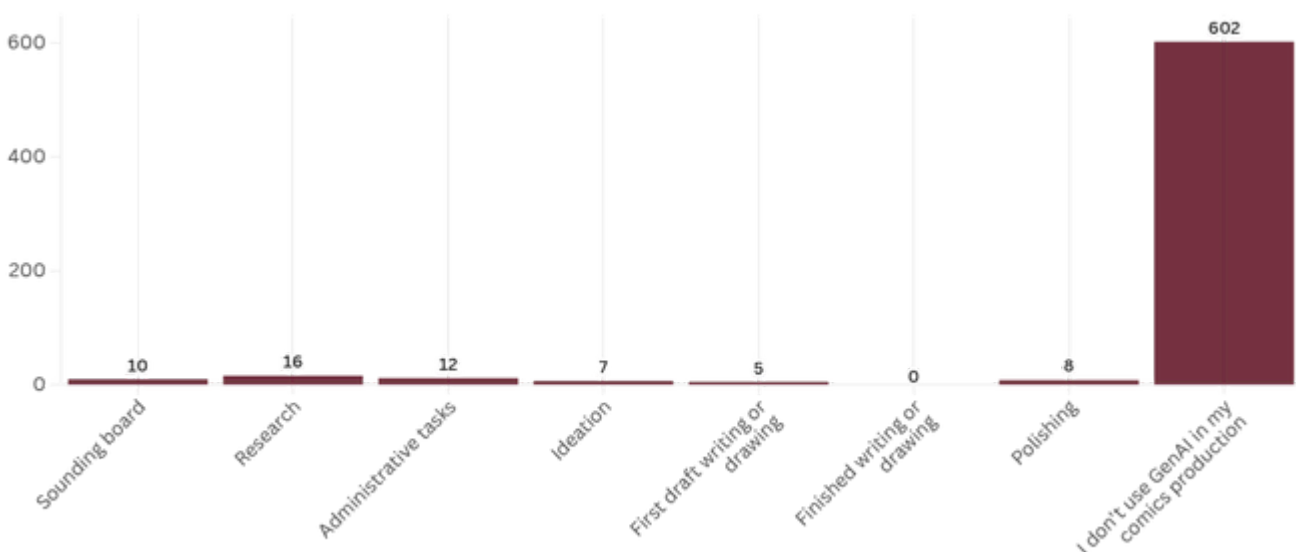


Base: 627

For the 25 respondents who reported using GenAI, the most popular use was for research (64%), followed by administrative tasks (48%), as a sounding board (40%), and for polishing (32%). The least common applications of GenAI were ideation (7 respondents) and first draft writing/drawing (5 respondents). No respondents used GenAI for final artwork or writing.

These numbers hint at broader trends in this data. Firstly, even when using GenAI, comic creators tend to use it more of an assistant, as opposed to a creative collaborator. As comic creators increasingly need to wear multiple hats, to be not only writer and artist, but editor, marketer, accountant, publisher, the amount of time comic creators are able to spend on simply creating seems to be slowly diminishing.

What do you use GenAI for in your comics production?



Base: 627

This use of GenAI as an administrative and editing assistant hints to the growing need for supporting comic creators in these endeavours. Secondly, the use of GenAI as a sounding board echoes concerns around confidence levels – 31% of respondents stated that a lack of confidence in their abilities was a key challenge. This raises a core question: how can we build sustainable communities and networks that can support fellow comic creators (foregrounding human sounding boards) and how can we foster confidence in creators of all backgrounds and experience levels?

For the majority who are not using GenAI, however, the technology is not a tool. It is a disruption, rearticulating and reconfiguring existing tensions around intellectual property, ownership, and financial instability – tensions which already existed in the industry, as the 2020 report explores, and which GenAI has sharpened considerably.

GenAI's impact reverberates through all slices of the industry, from big to small. The most immediately felt impact has been marked by a decline in commissions, particularly at the smaller end of the market. Portraits, avatars, character design, book covers, event posters, logos, band artwork – the kind of jobs which historically kept creators afloat between larger projects – have, for many of the respondents, simply stopped being available. **'Smaller illustration work, the small jobs that tide you over, have all but disappeared'**, one creator wrote. Another reported receiving **'a lot less commissions in the past two years, compared to 2020-2022'**. These smaller commissions were the backbone of many creators' financial stability. As we see comic creators' income streams becoming more and more fractured, pushing creators to try to pick up an increasing amount of part-time, freelance, and commissioned work, the increased adoption of GenAI adds even more pressure onto burnt-out comic creators.

**“THE RISE OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE ARTISTIC FIELDS IS A CURSE
THAT WE WILL COME TO REGRET AND MAKES THE CREATION OF ART
FEEL LIKE SHOUTING INTO THE WIND”**

Many creators described a pattern which has become grimly familiar: submitting a quote, being turned down, and then seeing the finished piece appear shortly afterwards – clearly generated by AI. Some reported that previously reliable repeat clients have gone quiet: **'clients who would regularly commission me have dried up after they started posting AI images on their social media'**, one respondent noted. Others watched the work migrate in real time: a band which once commissioned album art now uses GenAI; a magazine which ran regular freelance illustrations now fills those slots with AI-generated images; friends who previously commissioned respondents now openly use GenAI instead. This is, in part, due to compounding financial concerns of the Cost of Living Crisis and the **'cheap'** nature of GenAI.

According to one respondent, **'commissioning editors have told me that AI is free and a good option for cash-strapped newsrooms'**. Another respondent reported not being paid properly: **'multiple commissioners have told me that they used AI for the brief I had been given instead of paying me in full'**. The increased access to GenAI has also meant a deluge of requests for cheaper commissioned work: **'I literally have idiots in my inbox every other day asking for lower commission/freelance prices because "but AI can do it for free"'**. For many of the respondents, it was clear that, in a world where spending on comics work becomes less of a priority and possibility, GenAI seems to be attempting to fill the gap.

"I'M FEELING A LOT OF DREAD AND HOPELESSNESS AT THE GROWING INCLUSION OF AI, INTENSE CAPITALISM AND RAMPANT DEVALUING OF THE ARTS IN GENERAL."

Moreover, many comics creators reported needing to work with GenAI in their collaborations, and at times, being penalised for pushing back against this. Clients have sent AI-generated mockups, briefs, and storyboards (including for a large national broadcaster), expecting comic creators to work with these references (and often, at a lower rate). Two reported being explicitly hired to improve such GenAI content: one to edit AI material and another to redraw AI illustrations. Yet, when comic creators pushed back against this practice, they were removed from projects. One respondent wrote: **'my first and only experience in a professional environment I was heavily pushed towards using AI. I was mysteriously dropped from the project.'** Another described **'clients approaching me with GenAI examples, and ghosting me when I objected.'**

To comic creators, this proliferation of AI in the comics workflow is indicative of the devaluing of art. Their work is likely being used, without consent, credit, or compensation, to train the very models now displacing them. Multiple respondents have found clear examples of their work being used for training without permission, including graphic novels and cartoons listed as having been scraped in the recent Anthropic copyright lawsuit. One found their website flagged on generative AI prompt lists multiple times. Another illustrator described finding models built specifically on their art style, with over 120,000 images generated using it – and a corresponding drop in their monthly commissions from four or five a month to one or three. **'If you post work online, they have it by now'**, one respondent stated. This resignation underpins many of the growing fears around a future defined by GenAI art, and respondents were overall extremely pessimistic about their future as a result.

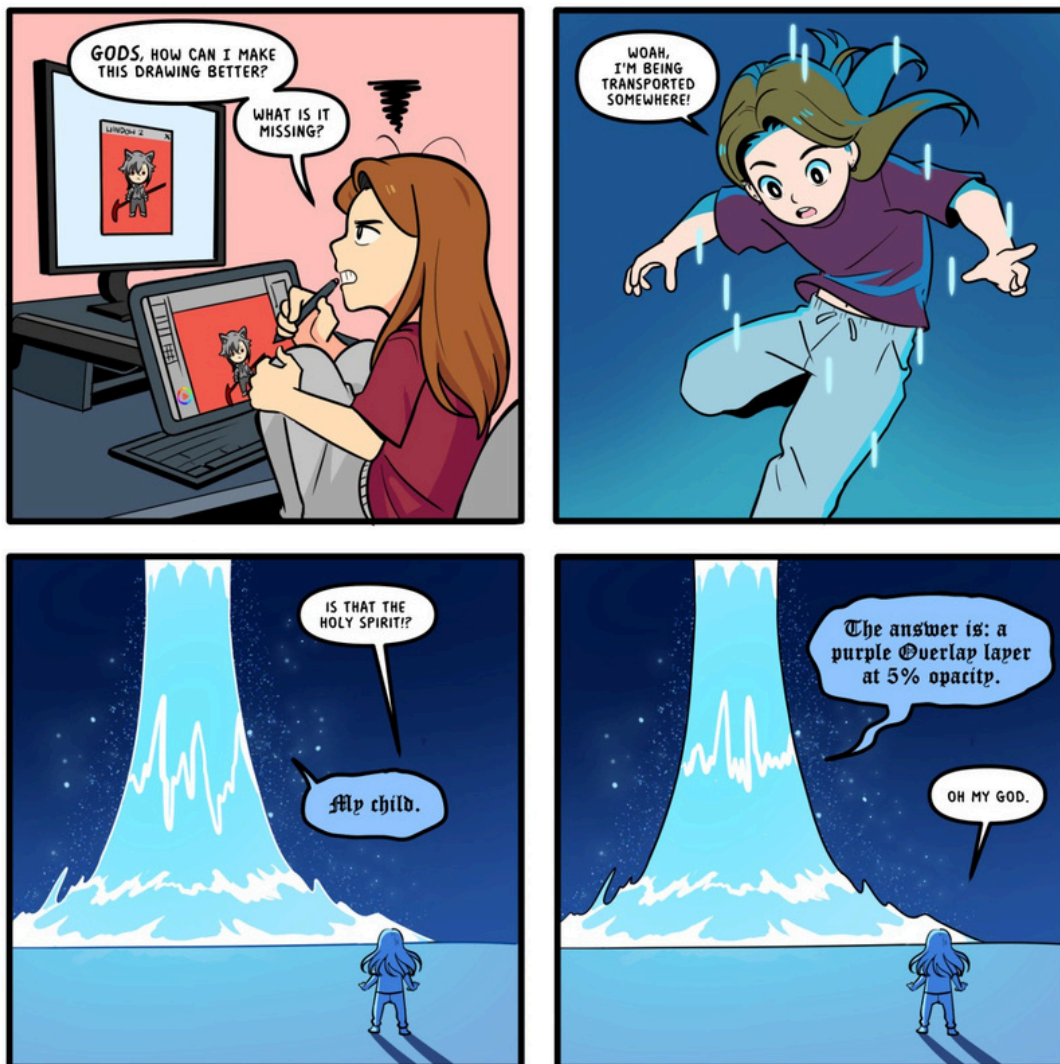
'THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT FOR WEAKENING COPYRIGHT AND IP IN FAVOUR OF AI COMPANIES IS EXTREMELY WORRYING AND MAKES ME EVEN LESS CONFIDENT IN EVER BEING ABLE TO WORK PROFESSIONALLY IN COMICS'

Many respondents expressed that people's AI literacy is low: **'the standards have changed, and people don't know the [difference] between generated images and hand made work anymore'**. Another respondent reflected that their **'artistic practice and vocation is devalued if no one cares to know the difference'**. Meaning, if the general population often does not notice differences between human-made and AI-generated visuals, or does not care to, and GenAI content is much cheaper to produce than hiring a creator, more people will continue to pick AI over human comic creator (and other creative professions). In doing so, **'Gen AI has devalued comics, and art as a whole'**.

As one respondent put it, GenAI has **'warped the public's perception on what art is'**. For comic creators who already grapple with feeling that their medium is not as respected as more traditional art forms, the burden sits even heavier. Despite comics creators' strong feelings against GenAI, they are disproportionately affected by their impact on larger society. It is a silent, growing threat: **'it goes unnoticed, and there is not enough to disincentivise the use of AI'**.

POLICY POWER-UPS

This section focuses on possible futures: it suggests policy, structural, and practice recommendations to address the previously outlined challenges. While many of the issues comic creators face cannot be 'resolved' - the cost of living crisis and the rise of GenAI are not going anywhere - significant improvements could be made through better structural support systems. These recommendations are based on both the data analysis conducted from the results of this survey, and direct suggestions from survey respondents.



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1: How to Train Your Drawing

While many comic creators are self-taught, increased training opportunities in the UK would not just be a way to practise the craft and build confidence, but also serve as venues to connect with other creators and forge lasting bonds. However, in a national context of ‘university-fication’ of previously craft-oriented professions, especially in art and design, these opportunities may not necessarily lie in more university courses focusing on comics. Industry bodies, publishers, arts funders, arts development organisations and further education providers could collaborate to provide vocational training opportunities instead.

Apprenticeships, practice-based training programmes, and affordable short courses covering sequential storytelling, lettering, colouring, digital and analogue art skills, visual narrative, publishing and production workflows, and the business realities of comics publishing could cater to different time commitments and career stages. These programmes should prioritise accessible entry routes – including regional provision, flexible part-time formats, and paid trainee opportunities – to reduce barriers for emerging creators who cannot afford unpaid development periods.

Embedding mentorships with working professionals, partnerships with independent publishers, and placement opportunities within studios or comic imprints would strengthen career sustainability while building a more diverse and skilled comics workforce across the UK. Moreover, the development of dedicated vocational training pathways would help the wider recognition of comics as a distinct creative and technical discipline, rather than a subset of illustration or creative writing.

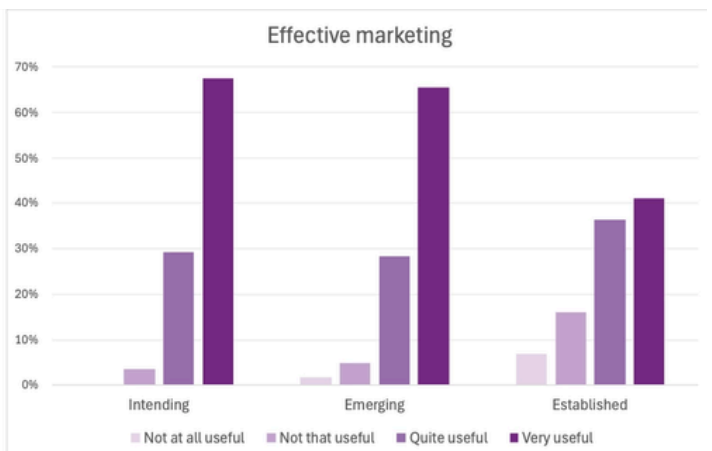
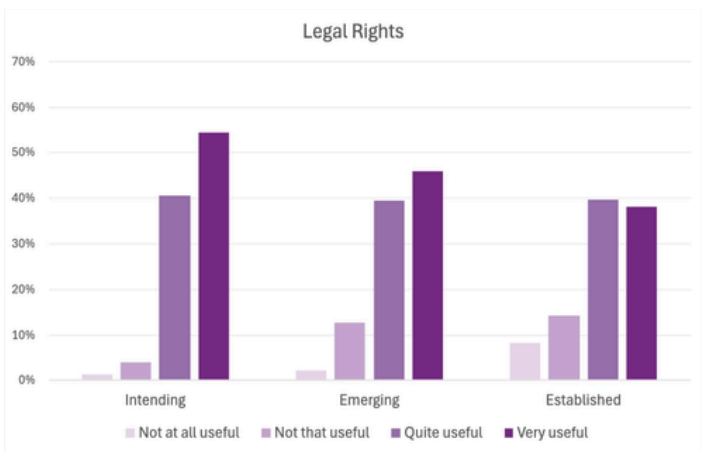
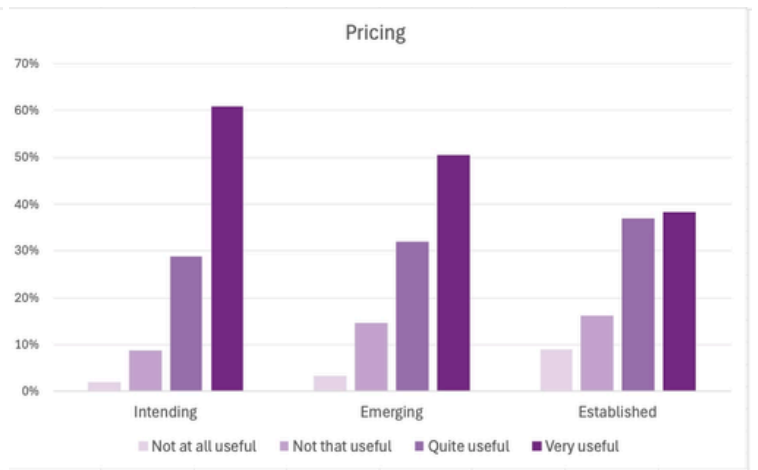
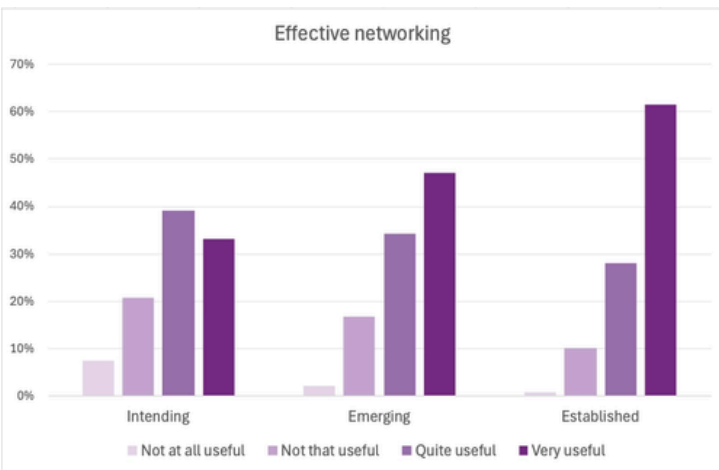
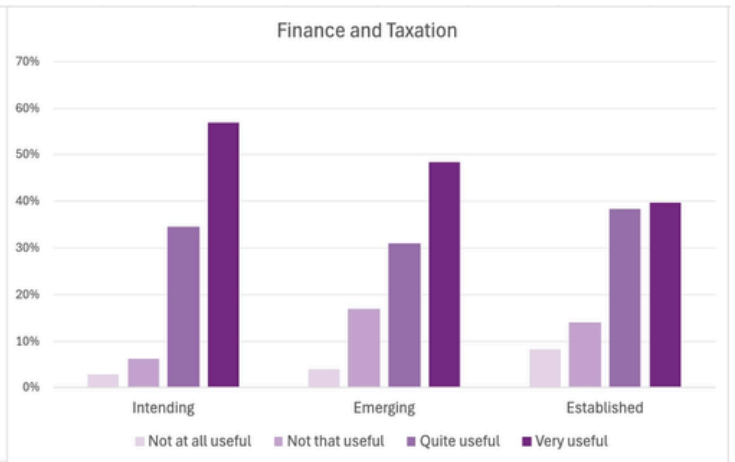
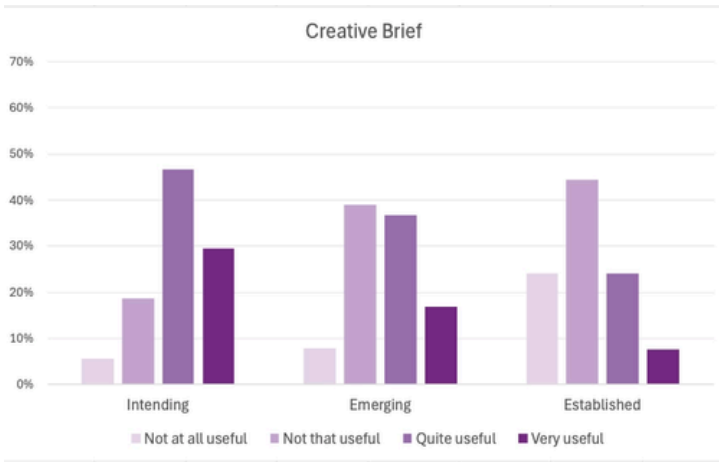


Develop comics-specific vocational training and apprenticeships, prioritising craft-based and regionally accessible provision.

2: Resourceful

Many respondents highlighted a strong need for practical training and ongoing support in the business and professional skills required to sustain a career in comics, particularly in marketing, promotion, networking, and financial management. This could either take the form of targeted professional development programmes or accessible guidance materials. In particular, financial planning, information on taxation, income diversification, and freelance business management could actively support and improve resilience in the majority of creators who struggle with irregular incomes and a lack of financial security.

Training needs varied depending on career level. For example, while those with an established career in comics reported that more training regarding effective networking would be very useful, very few were interested in support with responding to a creative brief. On the other hand, those intending to have a career and those with an emerging career in comics felt that financial training, such as around finances and taxation, prices, and effective marketing would be very useful. All three were keenly interested in training around legal rights.



While this form of support does not negate rising costs for materials and living expenses, it could provide essential tools for creators to better navigate these challenges. Aside from training and resources, there is plenty of potential for technical innovation to create small-scale support tools. Funding comic-specific tool development, as for instance exists in the novel writing community, may help support comic creators in their day-to-day management of workloads and pressures.



Create practical guidance resources covering financial management, taxation, IP rights, and freelance business skills.

3: Safety Nets

The fragmented labour model present in the UK comics industry places significant financial and psychological strain on creators, particularly during gaps between commissions or publication cycles. In many cases, even short-term income loss can trigger longer-term instability. Respondents indicated that relatively modest, temporary financial safety nets, such as short-term base income schemes, gap-funding bursaries, or flexible emergency grants, could prevent creators from falling into cycles of precarity which ultimately push them out of the industry.

Targeted support should be designed to bridge intermittent income gaps, rather than replace earnings entirely. They would help sustain creative continuity, retain skilled practitioners, and recognise the irregular production timelines inherent to comics creation.



Introduce short-term financial safety nets like gap-funding bursaries and emergency grants to prevent creators from being forced out of the industry during income gaps.

4: Platforming the UK

There is innovation potential in developing locally focused, pay-for-support platforms tailored to the UK comics market which allows audiences to directly sustain creators through community-based patronage models. Unlike global platforms, UK-specific regionally anchored systems could integrate local comic shops, libraries, festivals, and creative hubs, strengthening place-based creative economies while fostering closer relationships between creators and audiences. Such platforms could support subscription memberships, micro-patronage, or cooperative funding models for different levels of financial support.

A shared national infrastructure could help diversify creator income streams, reduce reliance on unstable global algorithms, and create new pathways for independent and emerging voices. They could also introduce eligibility standards to disincentivise the use of GenAI in order to promote human creation and safeguard the integrity of the medium. However, there is an inherent risk of further sidelining people who struggle with access to the comic industry as it is. Therefore, a key priority would have to be to create such a platform accessibility-first, and to ensure that the underpinning organisational systems of the platform do not merely replicate the dynamics present on international platforms.

This could include, but is not limited to, approaches like making niche themes, work or creators easily searchable, and encouraging connections with live events, whether online or offline. With appropriate sector coordination, the UK could position itself as a leader in sustainable creator-audience funding models adapted specifically to comics and small-scale publishing practices.



Invest in a UK-specific creator-to-audience platform which enables regional community patronage, integrates with local cultural infrastructure, and prioritises accessibility and human-generated works.

5: Con Artists

Respondents emphasised the importance of targeted funding and subsidy schemes to revitalise local comics festivals and support con attendance. The disappearance of smaller regional festivals has concentrated activity into a limited number of large conventions, creating bottlenecks which restrict access for emerging and independent creators while increasing competition for tables and audiences.

One strategic intervention would be partnerships with local councils, libraries, and cultural venues to revitalise smaller festivals. Part of this becoming possible is a recognition of comics as a cultural art form – to treat it as future heritage in the same way we treat other valuable cultural products. Through this lens, there is a variety of potential funding sources in the UK which could support smaller, community-rooted conventions to diversify access points for audiences and strengthen regional creative economies while alleviating pressure on large-scale events.

Provisions of specific guidance, support and funding for would-be organisers of fairs and festivals can ensure grassroots development of new, regional and specific-interest comic events. This could include mentorship from established festival organisers and directors.

To address the issues faced by creators at larger cons, there are three key considerations. Firstly, to address rising table fees, travel costs, and accommodation and access expenses, funding for subsidised tables and travel bursaries are essential. Secondly, to accommodate the large proportion of disabled and neurodivergent creators, access needs must be a core consideration for festivals of all sizes, with clear communication of these provisions made available as soon as exhibitor applications are open.

Thirdly, there are a number of potential structures which could help creators overcome a variety of barriers. Online or in-person networking possibilities before the event itself, for instance, to help newcomers make connections ahead of time and help with anxiety. Schemes to spotlight specific creators, such as Thought Bubble's maps highlighting disabled creators, Global Majority creators, and LGBTQ+ creators, to increase visibility and discoverability to both audiences and other exhibitors, or a 'recommendation menu' of niche interests which could encourage attendees to 'find their people'.

There could also be community tables, as in Caption Festival, where volunteers sell comics on behalf of creators who are then free to experience the festival, watch talks and panels, and connect with other creators. Paying a share of sales rather than a table fee would make it easier for emerging creators with few titles to justify attendance, and alleviate a major barrier for creators unable to exhibit due to mental health reasons. There is also the possibility of a remote table, as in Sequential Scotland, for creators who are unable to attend due to disability.

It is essential that while acknowledging costs being a big prohibitor especially for less established creators, festival culture needs to change its structures if it wants to foster diversity, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability.



Fund subsidised table fees and travel bursaries for conventions, and support smaller regional festivals through partnerships with local councils, libraries, cultural venues and funders, prioritise accessibility, offer training and resources to encourage grassroots events.

6: Being Well

While mental and physical health are difficult issues to address in isolation from all the existing pressures inside and outside of the comics industry, a first step is recognising that comic creators are disproportionately affected by economic shifts due to the precarity of their work. Government bodies, arts councils, and industry organisations could introduce sector-specific wellbeing initiatives, including access to subsidised mental health support for freelancers and peer-support networks.

Integrating mental health guidance and wellbeing budgets into arts funding schemes, alongside clearer standards for fair pay, realistic delivery timelines, and safe working expectations, would help address structural rather than purely individual causes of stress. This could potentially be integrated in a move towards UK-based comics platforms – to lead with an example of fairness and good working practice in contrast to many international platforms' exploitative structures.

Industry-led interventions like mentorship programmes, subsidised community studios – maybe an office with an enormous empty lobby or one of the many long-vacant retail sites would be interested in having local comic artists set up their work spaces there – and professional associations for comics creators could further reduce isolation and strengthen collective support systems.

Being connected with the community is crucial from a wellbeing perspective: survey respondents who had community support around them tended to have far less pessimistic views of the industry than those who did not. While comics creators are for the most part connected online via social media, regional in-person and online social groups with regular meet-ups exist around the country. These volunteer-led informal and semi-formal communities should be supported wherever necessary to ensure greater connectivity and wellbeing.

'Unionising' was brought up as a goal by several survey respondents, both in relation to facing struggles together and also to share information and find rapport with other creators. This goes hand-in-hand with many respondents stating they sought more opportunities for collaboration: with better connections and locally distributed networks, creative collaborations could become an essential building stone in ensuring long-term wellbeing for comic creators.



Introduce sector-specific wellbeing initiatives for freelancers, including peer networks, mentoring schemes, best-practice guidance on fair pay and working conditions, subsidised mental health support, and community studio spaces.

7: Do It Like the French

“I FEEL LIKE THE COMICS INDUSTRY IN THE UK PALES IN COMPARISON TO OTHER COUNTRIES LIKE JAPAN, AMERICA AND FRANCE.”

Several respondents noted the differences between the UK comics industry and the markets in other European countries, particularly France and Belgium. While some described **‘a distinct lack of professionalism and vision’** in the UK industry, others described struggling to find their place in it. The Japanese and US markets were also recognised as points of comparison, despite their different sizes and audiences. For many UK creators, these markets pose significant income opportunities which they cannot find in the local industry: **‘It’s not taken as seriously and there are much fewer financial opportunities, as well as long-term opportunities to become serialised and gain a steady income’**. Part of this stems from the appreciation of comics, as one respondent stated: **‘I wish the UK accepted the art-form the same way in terms of popularity and in the number of publishers’**. The **‘French attitude to comics’** is decidedly different, with several respondents wondering if this model **‘could take root here in the UK’**.

The UK was perceived as **‘considerably lagging behind’** its European neighbours **‘in terms of the social perception of the cultural importance of comics’**. This lack of recognition is partially perpetuated from within the industry. Respondents described the UK market as **‘propped up by amateurs’**, **‘very niche and underfunded’**, and does not garner the **‘passionate’** engagement other markets do. Some respondents attributed this to bookshops and galleries not mixing **‘comics in with other genres and art forms’**, while others critiqued publishers’ inability to publish at European scale due to a lack of funds. Several saw **‘UK comics authors’** being as **‘well distributed and well known and respected as other literary or artistic producers are’** as key to garnering more cultural mainstream acceptance. In order to facilitate this wider reach, funding is essential.

Only 11% of UK survey respondents reported that they received direct income from grants or awards, with 46 respondents stating that they received financial support from public bodies. Notably, while 28 respondents stated they received funding from Arts Council England, and 12 respondents from Creative Scotland, none of the 689 survey respondents received funding from Arts Councils in Wales or Northern Ireland. Two respondents reported applying for British Council funding, unsuccessfully. This shows a stark contrast to the French comics market, which many UK creators referred to as an aspirational model.

France's approach is relatively unique: comics, or *bandes dessinées* (BD), are constitutionally embedded in French cultural policy as *le neuvième art* ('the ninth art'). This phrase, coined in the 1960s, summarises comics being treated at the same level of cultural value as cinema, literature, and fine art¹². France's government has historically recognised the cultural significance of comics and literature, and this attitude shapes almost every aspect of how the industry operates, from funding infrastructure to the education system, where BD titles like *Persepolis* appear in school curricula. This has led to France dominating the European market, holding a 40.8% market share in 2024¹³.

The success of manga was noted by many respondents as a double-edged sword: there was appreciation for a comic form garnering wide-spread success, but also dismay over only manga being perpetuated by bookshops and sellers. France, where manga makes up 52% of sales, compared to the homegrown children's BD and genre BD with 22% each, has approached this by producing *mafra* - French-produced manga. This showcases the potential of channelling a popular format into a local production context, highlighting stories and characters which especially young readers, who make up the majority of manga consumers, can relate to and see themselves represented in. UK-grown manga is not just an opportunity to increase sales and develop a new market, but also harbours potential for representing culturally relevant narratives in an accessible format.

The French comics industry presents a good example in other respects, too. The CNL (Centre National du Livre) supports the entire production chain: authors, publishers, booksellers, libraries. This includes author grants (tiered scale: £3000/£6000/£12,000/£25,000; three application windows per year), publisher grants to support translations and international publishing (CNL covering 40-70% of cost), tax breaks (small to medium-sized publishers being able to offset up to 25% of production cost), festival support, and digital development.

Additionally, *Pass Culture*, an initiative offering young people subsidies for cultural purchases, included comics.

Notably, in the city of Angoulême, where France’s most important comics festival is hosted, several government institutions have built an infrastructure aimed at long-term skills support and heritage appreciation for comics. A Museum of Comics, specialist libraries, a research centre, and the Maison des Auteurs, an international artists’ residency where comic creators can spend between three months and two years, have all been publicly funded. It is worth noting, however, that the annual Angoulême festival has faced a high-profile governance and funding crisis, including boycotts and public subsidy pressure, which underlies the comics sector’s current stress around transparency, safety, and power structures, despite the market remaining huge¹⁷.

France is not the only country which treats comics as cultural heritage: in Norway, comics are treated explicitly as literature for funding purposes, enabling wider arts council funding¹⁵. In contrast, Arts Council England’s emphasis on supporting opera, ballet, theatre, and orchestras has led to substantial funding allocations for these genres, whereas comics receive comparatively little support. Amongst ACE’s National Portfolio Organisations, which receive multi-year core investment, funding is £14.18 per head for opera audiences and £5.02 for ballet, whereas for comics audiences it is 1.5p per head. These are for adult audiences; when factoring in younger audiences, the spend is less than 0.5p per head¹⁶.

Not only are comics not being funded in proportion to other art forms, there is also no dedicated social protection system for UK comic creators. In France and several other EU countries, there are fallback infrastructures for creators in addition to grants, festival support, better distribution systems and higher levels of cultural integration. To address the pressing issues faced by comic creators in the UK, these financial safety nets for individuals are as important as large-scale sector support.



Recognise comics as a cultural art form in UK policy and increase Arts Council funding proportionally, based on the French model as an aspirational framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report calls for better support structures to make comics a sustainable career in the UK. The key ideas focus on access to funding, financial stability, improving training, visibility, and wellbeing for creators.

Who should act on this:

- **Government and arts councils** should lead on funding, policy recognition, and creating fairer support systems
- **Industry bodies and organisations** should help with training, guidance, and setting standards
- **Festivals, local councils, and cultural institutions** should improve access, visibility, and regional opportunities
- **Platforms and publishers** should play a role in fair pay, exposure, and sustainable working conditions

Immediate Priorities

ACTION	IMPACT	LEAD
Provide short-term financial support eg grants or bursaries	Prevents creators from leaving sector due to short-term financial instability	Industry bodies & orgs in collaboration with government & arts councils
Generate guidance and resources on funding, tax, IP etc	Helps creators navigate systems and increase professionalism	Industry bodies & orgs
Lower barriers to participation in festivals eg access grants and other accommodations	Allows more creators to take part in festivals, prevents bottlenecks of large festivals, increases diversity of events	Festivals, local councils & cultural institutions in conjunction with industry bodies & orgs
Offer resources for would-be festival/event organisers	Increases number of smaller, regional events to generate income, improve regional audience access and stimulate local growth	Industry bodies & orgs in collaboration with festivals, local councils & cultural institutions
Develop best practise guidance on fair pay and working conditions	Improves working conditions and pay to help wellbeing, raise sectoral standards	Industry bodies & orgs in collaboration with platforms & publishers
Support peer networks and mentoring schemes	Improves wellbeing and local connectivity, increase sector resilience and skill sharing	Industry bodies & orgs in collaboration with festivals, local councils & cultural institutions
Subsidise mental health provisions	Improves wellbeing and sector resilience	Industry bodies & orgs in collaboration with government & arts councils

Medium to Long-Term Priorities

ACTION	IMPACT	LEAD
Build training pathways and apprenticeships tailored to comics	Increases professionalism and sustainability of sector	Industry bodies & orgs in collaboration with platforms & publishers
Invest in UK-based platforms that connect creators to audiences in sustainable ways	Generates income and opportunities for creators, improves visibility and integrity of artform, increases audiences	Platforms, publishers, industry bodies & orgs in collaboration with government & arts councils
Provide more community spaces	Improves wellbeing and localised sustainability, connectivity and sector visibility	Festivals, local councils & cultural institutions in collaboration with government & arts councils
Improve protections for creators through tightened copyright and personality rights legislature	Ensures works are not used to train AI without permission or remuneration, protects integrity of creators established voice/style	Government in collaboration with industry bodies & orgs
Increase equitable access to funding at all levels (individuals, orgs, & would-be portfolio orgs) by tackling systemic biases	Increases income generation & opportunities. Develop new/improve existing infrastructure to increase access, opportunities and other innumerable benefits at every level	Government & arts councils
Recognise the cultural and social value of comics	Ensures the artform and its creators can be celebrated and supported in the same way as other areas of the arts	Government & arts councils

AMATEURS, ASSEMBLE

The word amateur derives from the Latin *amare*, 'to love'. In its original sense, an 'amateur' is not someone lacking skill or seriousness, but who does what they do out of love. By that definition, the UK comic industry is full of amateurs: people who have spent years, often decades, honing a craft which does not always pay them back in kind. That persistence is worth appreciating, but it also requires critical examination. The data in this report presents an industry with increasing commercial success and cultural visibility, which leaves many of the people who love it behind.

In 2025, the UK comics market reached its highest-ever total sales, making £78.7 million, an increase of 13.9% from £69.1 million in 2024, and 140.7% from £32.7 million in 2019. Adult graphic novel sales reached £52.8 million, an 8.4% increase on the previous year, while children's comic strip fiction and graphic novels hit £25.9 million – a staggering 28.7% year-on-year growth, and the biggest sales year the category has ever recorded in the UK³. These are not the numbers of a dying medium, but a thriving one. And yet, the people who make comics thrive are, more often than not, struggling to survive.

A significant portion of the 2025 growth is driven by manga, which now accounts for 49.1% of adult graphic novel sales in the UK. There is genuine reason to celebrate this: manga has brought hundreds of thousands of new readers, particularly young people, into comics in a way no other format has managed in recent memory. But the young readers who are discovering comics through manga are, by and large, reading stories which were not made for or about them, in terms of culture, language, place, or experience.

The opportunity here is not to resist manga's popularity, but to channel it: to ask what a UK-grown manga tradition might look like, who it might centre, and what stories it might tell which readers currently have to look elsewhere to find. France's answer to this question, the French-produced *mafra*, is instructive in how this can be achieved through systematic support structures. The UK has the talent and the appetite. What it lacks is the infrastructure to make the most of both.

This infrastructure gap is evident across different sections of the comics industry. Comic creators in the UK are not short of ingenuity, dedication, or skill. What they are lacking is structural support: the kind which recognises comic creation as the distinct, technically demanding, culturally significant discipline it is, rather than an offshoot of illustration or literature or a hobby which occasionally becomes a job.

The recommendations in the preceding section – vocational training, emergency funding, UK-specific platforms, accessible festivals, wellbeing support, and taking comics seriously as a cultural form – are achievable in the UK, and precedents for them exist. What is needed is the political and institutional will to act on them.

As well as creating new support structures there also needs to be greater connectivity between the comics sector and existing organisations in the wider cultural sectors, particularly the neighbouring fields of visual arts and literature. With targeted visibility, accessibility and programming, more comics creators can be in receipt of the benefits and opportunities already available to other artists.

More creators being part of professional membership schemes could significantly shift monetary distribution in the arena of intellectual property, too. Only 38% of respondents feel that they fully understand the IP rights which apply to their work. Over a third have been asked to sign those rights away as part of a contract. At a time when the relationship between comics and screen adaptations has never been so commercially significant, only 2% of comic creators report receiving income from production companies or broadcast media groups.

Without a clear understanding of their rights, without agents, without collective structures for negotiation, creators are navigating this landscape largely alone, whether by choice or by lack of opportunity. The question here is not how individual cases reflect on the industry at large, but how structural support can relieve the state of financial precarity a majority of creators is experiencing.

Comics' marginal position has been generative, producing work of extraordinary range and imagination. But there is a difference between choosing the edges and being pushed there by a lack of alternatives. The creators represented in this report did not choose precarity, they chose comics. Whether out of love, compulsion, or a conviction that this medium can do things no other form quite can, UK comic creators should not have to choose between comics and being able to survive. The structural conditions which make this choice feel inevitable are not inevitable at all – with different decisions around funding, policy, and industry governance, a different UK comics industry is possible.

Through fostering vocational training, building UK-based platforms, funding safety nets, and appreciating comics as a cultural art form, there is a chance to transform the UK comics industry into a more lucrative, sustainable, and liveable sector. It has the potential of becoming an environment in which the word amateur, in its truest sense, is not a consolation for the absence of a living wage, but a description of what makes the whole endeavour worth it in the first place.

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