

Medical Illustrator

Introduction

Medical illustrators produce images of medical conditions and the human anatomy, using a range of artistic and graphic techniques. They work in hospitals, medical schools and research institutions.

Also known as

- Artist, Medical
- Illustrator, Medical
- Medical Artist



Work Activities

As a Medical Illustrator, you will produce images of medical conditions, the human anatomy and medical equipment, using a range of artistic and graphic techniques. Your work is used for medical education, patient care, training and research.

You may also work on the design of publicity materials, reports and websites relating to the medical profession. You might copy slides and X-rays, and use software to produce presentations and other materials used for teaching, research and training.

Illustrators use computers to either manipulate initial sketches and drawings, or create images from scratch. You may also need to produce three-dimensional models.

You also work alongside Medical Photographers and Audio-Visual Technicians. Those who work in large departments usually specialise in one area, such as photography, whereas in small departments a Medical Illustrator may do many different tasks.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

As a Medical Illustrator, you need:

- An interest in science, medicine and the human anatomy.
- An interest and ability in art.
- To be able to work in distressing situations, for example, you may have to work at a post-mortem.
- To communicate well with all staff working in medicine.
- IT skills.
- To pay attention to detail.

If you work as a self-employed or freelance Medical Illustrator, you'll need business and marketing skills.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

NHS employees are paid on a rising scale within defined pay bands, according to their skills and responsibilities. The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Medical Illustrators earn Band 5 pay of £22,128 - £28,746

Hours of work

Medical Illustrators usually work a standard 37.5-hour week, Monday to Friday. Part-time opportunities are also available.

Working hours for self-employed Illustrators may be irregular, depending on how much work you have. However, late finishes and weekend work may be required from time to time, especially as deadlines approach.

Where could I work?

Employers include departments of medical illustration in hospitals and medical schools, in private medicine and in research establishments.

Work for medical publishing companies can sometimes be on two- to three-year contracts.

Opportunities for Medical Illustrators occur with employers in towns and cities throughout the UK.

Self-employment

Some Medical Illustrators work on a freelance basis, gaining work from the medical profession or publishers of academic or general interest textbooks and CDs.

Some illustrators use the services of agents to gain commissions and short-term contract work.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised on the Institute of Medical Illustrators (IMI) website, on the NHS website and in trade industry journals/magazines.

Vacancies are also advertised on all the major job boards, on Universal Jobmatch, and at Jobcentre Plus.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

Medical Illustrators usually need a degree in Illustration or a related subject. Illustrators with experience who have worked in a commercial environment may also be able to enter this profession.

Relevant foundation degrees, HNCs and HNDs are available and can be used as a route on to degree courses. Subjects like graphic design, and art and design would be most useful.

Foundation courses in Art and Design are available and can be used as a route on to degree courses.

Training

Medical Illustrators working in hospitals usually start off as trainees, with training given by experienced colleagues.

Most Medical Illustrators work towards a relevant postgraduate qualification.

Relevant courses are listed on the Institute of Medical Illustrators (IMI) website.

The IMI also offers training courses, meetings and an annual conference as part of continuing professional development (CPD).

The Medical Artists' Education Trust also provides information on courses and training.

Progression

Some Medical Illustrators become self-employed and work on a freelance basis.

Freelancers usually gain experience by first working in a medical illustration department or as an assistant to an established Medical Illustrator.

Other Medical Illustrators progress to become head of the department, where they take on more responsibility and decision making.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

This career is an exception to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that you must supply information to an employer about any spent or unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, if they ask you to. This is different from other careers, where you only have to reveal information on unspent convictions if you are asked to.

Qualifications

For entry to a relevant degree, you'll usually need:

- 2 or more A levels. Many courses ask that you have at least a B grade in an art-based subject.
- 4/5 GCSEs at grade C or above. A pass in English is often required.

Alternatives to A levels include:

- A BTEC level 3 National Diploma in Fine Art or related subject
- An Advanced Level Apprenticeship
- The International Baccalaureate Diploma

For the IBD, many courses will ask that you have Art at Higher level.

Many other qualifications are also accepted so check prospectuses for more details.

To enter any course in art and design, you'll need a portfolio of your work.

Some people enter this career via a Foundation course in Art and Design. The usual entry requirements for a relevant Foundation course are:

- 1/2 A levels. You'll need an A level in art or in an art-based subject.
- GCSEs at grade C or above in 4/5 subjects. Some courses ask that you have a pass in English

Acceptable alternatives to A levels include:

- BTEC National Diploma in Fine Art, or related course
- The International Baccalaureate Diploma
- An Advanced Level Apprenticeship

Many other qualifications are also accepted so check prospectuses for more details.

The entry requirements for relevant HNCs, HNDs and foundation degrees are similar to those needed for the Foundation course mentioned above.

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A-level.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Skills/experience

Entrants with relevant illustration skills (for example, gained by doing graphic design) can do further training. Keeping your skills updated, especially by using software in computer graphics/arts, is important. Knowledge of printing techniques and some commercial awareness is an advantage for those illustrators working with publishers.

To enter the work or relevant courses, you normally need to have a portfolio of work demonstrating your ability.

Courses

If you don't have the qualifications needed to enter your chosen degree or HND course, a college or university Access course, such as Access to Art and Design, could be the way in. No formal qualifications are usually required, but you should check individual course details.

It's also possible to do a part-time Art Foundation course, which leads to a degree or HND course.

Distance learning

Cardiff University offers a PgCert in Medical Illustration by distance learning.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
Tel: 0800 015 0400
Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk
- **Skills Development Scotland - Modern Apprenticeships**
Tel: 0800 9178000
Email: info@skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk
Website: www.myworldofwork.co.uk/modernapprenticeships
- **ScreenSkills**
Skills for the creative industries
Email: info@creativeskillset.org
Website: www.creativeskillset.org
- **Creative Choices**
Publisher: Creative & Cultural Skills
Email: info@creative-choices.co.uk
Website: www.creative-choices.co.uk
- **Creative & Cultural Skills**
Skills for craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing arts and visual arts
Email: london@ccskills.org.uk
Website: ccskills.org.uk
- **Institute of Medical Illustrators (IMI)**
Address: 12 Coldbath Square, London EC1R 5HL
Tel: 020 7837 2846
Email: info@imi.org.uk
Website: www.imi.org.uk
- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**
Tel: 0800 028 4844
Website: ams.careerswales.com/
- **Cardiff University**
Email: admissions@cardiff.ac.uk

Website: www.cardiff.ac.uk

Related Careers

- Design Assistant
- Fashion Designer
- Graphic Designer
- Artworker
- Metal Engraver
- Visual Merchandiser
- Commercial Illustrator
- Signmaker
- Ceramics Designer
- Footwear Designer
- Furniture Designer
- Product Designer
- Vehicle Designer
- Interior Designer
- Jewellery Designer
- Packaging Designer
- Textile Designer
- Costume Designer
- Theatre Designer
- Musical Instrument Technician
- Picture Researcher
- Technical/Scientific Illustrator
- Model Maker
- Picture Framer
- Designer
- Illustrator
- Artist
- CGI Artist
- VFX Artist
- Nostalgist