

Commercial Illustrator

Introduction

Commercial illustrators produce drawings, images, paintings or diagrams for a lot of the products we see and buy in shops. This can range from children's books to greetings cards and all forms of advertising.

Commercial illustrators use a range of artistic and graphic techniques in their work.

Also known as

- Advertising Illustrator

Work Activities

Commercial illustrators produce drawings, images, paintings or diagrams to communicate ideas or information visually, or to make a product easier to understand or appear more attractive.

They use a range of artistic and graphic techniques, producing illustrations for a wide variety of products, such as:

- websites
- fashion magazines
- brochures and leaflets
- greetings cards
- packaging.

A lot of these products are items we see and buy in shops, and the illustration may be used to help advertise and sell a product. In other cases, the illustration may be used to make something appear attractive, such as a greetings card or book cover, and to help visualise a story, such as drawings in a book or magazine.

Commercial illustrators begin their work from a brief, given to them by a client, for example, an organisation launching a new product or an advertising agency. The brief outlines:

- what information the user needs to get from the illustration
- what type of product needs illustrating
- the style, theme or mood
- who it is aimed at
- the timescales and budgets involved.

Illustrators may need to create a storyboard, which is a breakdown of a sequence of illustrations, often with accompanying text, to show how they would follow from each other, for example, in a book.

Commercial illustrators present their initial ideas and drawings to the client, who may accept them or ask for some changes to be made. Once the ideas have been approved, the illustrator then goes on to complete the final artwork.

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 commercial illustrator, you need:



- A creative imagination.
- To work well using different art techniques and mediums.
- An understanding of colour, shape and form.
- IT skills.
- Good communication, presentation and negotiation skills.
- To work to deadlines and budgets.
- Commercial awareness.

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

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

Pay rates for commercial illustrators vary with the industry and range of work they accept.

The pay rates given below are approximate.

Employed commercial illustrators earn in the range of £18,000 - £25,500 a year, rising to around £26,500 - £40,000 a year. Pay rates for freelance illustrators vary with the job. A useful guide to freelance rates is found on the National Union of Journalists website - see contact details.

Self-employed commercial illustrators can earn as much or more than those employed by an organisation. However, earnings when starting out can be low, and when established may fluctuate according to the workload. Some commercial illustrators combine graphic design with illustration in order to maintain a decent income.

Hours of work

Employed commercial illustrators usually work a basic 39-hour week, Monday to Friday. Part-time opportunities are also available.

Self-employed commercial illustrators set their own hours, which may be irregular, depending on how much work they have. However, late finishes and weekend work are required from time to time, especially as deadlines approach.

What's happening in this work area?

The design sector now operates in a very commercial global market, with emerging economies, for example, India and China, posing an immediate threat.

However, the strong growth of the UK service industry has led to the opening up of new markets, and helped the design sector to achieve a position of strength. The recognition of the importance of design, within the global market, has helped the sector to emerge from the recent recession in a strong position.

Technology has helped to greatly speed up the design process, making it possible for designers to take on many more projects. However, fewer people are now required to complete tasks, resulting in a very competitive recruitment market.

Competition for illustrator posts is strong, as there are often more applicants than vacancies.

Where could I work?

Employers include publishers, advertising agencies, the broadcasting industry and commercial businesses.

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

Self-employment

Most commercial illustrators are self-employed and often work from home. However, the ability for individuals to promote their work online via the internet means location is less important.

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

Where are vacancies advertised?

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

It's a good idea to build up a network of relevant contacts, as not all illustration jobs are advertised. Making speculative job applications can also be effective.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

An Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship is also great place to start.

However, commercial illustrators 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.

It may also be possible to enter this career via a degree in a more general subject area, such as art or graphic design.

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

The Association of Illustrators (AOI) provides seminars and training events for members.

There are also postgraduate courses in illustration. Some focus on specific areas, for example, children's books.

Progression

Many illustrators become self-employed once fully trained.

With experience, it's possible to move into different areas of the industry. This could be, for example, animation or cartoons.

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.
- The International Baccalaureate Diploma

For the International Baccalaureate Diploma, 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:

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

To get onto an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship, you'll usually need five GCSEs at grade C or above, possibly including English and Maths.

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

Relevant skills gained in graphic design, for example, are useful. However, entry to this work is very competitive.

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

Many commercial illustrators use agents in order to find possible work. A list of relevant agents is listed on the Association of Illustrators (AOI) website.

Courses

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

Part-time courses at local colleges or home study in computer design packages such as QuarkXpress, Freehand, Flash, etc, are useful to maintain/develop skills, and enhance your portfolio of work.

Part-time MA/PgD/PgCs in Illustration are available at numerous universities and educational establishments.

Distance learning

The University of Hertfordshire offers an MA/PgD/PgC in Illustration and an MA/PgD/PgC in Graphic Design, both by distance learning.

Training

The AOI runs occasional seminars (for example, introduction to starting out as an illustrator), which are useful for newcomers.

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

- **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

- **Association of Illustrators (AOI)**

Address: Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA

Tel: 020 7759 1010

Email: info@theaoi.com

Website: www.theaoi.com

- **a-n The Artists Information Company**

Email: info@a-n.co.uk

Website: www.a-n.co.uk

- **Creative Scotland**

Scottish enquiries

Email: enquiries@creativescotland.com

Website: www.creativescotland.com

- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**

Tel: 0800 028 4844

Website: ams.careerswales.com/

Related Careers

- Medical Illustrator
- Design Assistant
- Fashion Designer
- Graphic Designer
- Artworker
- Metal Engraver
- Visual Merchandiser
- 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 Frammer
- Designer
- Illustrator
- Artist
- CGI Artist
- VFX Artist

- Nostalgist