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# WHAT ARE WORDS WORTH NOW? THE FULL STORY

## Release of the full ALCS-commissioned report into authors' earnings reveals incomes on the slide, but self-publishing making an increasing contribution.

Last summer, ALCS released some sobering initial findings from its latest survey of authors' earnings, under the heading, *What Are Words Worth Now?* These included the revelation that the typical income of a professional author had fallen by 29% since 2005, along with the fact that increasingly few professional authors are able to earn a living solely from their writing, with just 11.5% doing so (down from 40% in 2005).

Today Queen Mary, University of London which conducted the research publishes *The Business of Being an Author: A Survey of Authors' Earnings and Contracts*, the full report based on a survey of the earnings of almost 2500 working writers.

Among the further findings of *The Business of Being an Author*:

### The Writing Life and Earnings

- The earnings picture is very top heavy: the top 5% earned 42.3% of all the money earned by professional authors.
- The bottom 50% (those earning £10,432 or less) earned only 7% of all the money earned by all writers cumulatively.
- 17% of all writers did not earn any money from writing in 2013, despite 98% of these having had a work published or exploited in each year from 2010 to 2013.
- Since 2005, the typical author has become poorer against society as a whole and now (from self-employed writing) earns only 87% of the present minimum wage.

### Publishing Advances and Contracts

- 44% of authors stated that the size of the advances they had received from publishers had declined over the past five years.
- 46% of authors said they had signed a buy-out contract (where there is a single payment for use of their work without the further payment of royalties), with 30% stating that the prevalence of such contracts was on the increase.

## Self-Publishing

- A quarter of authors have self-published a book.
- Among authors who have self-published, the top 10% of earners made a profit of £7,000 or more.
- The top 20% of earners among authors who have self-published made a profit of almost £3,000.
- The bottom 20% of authors who have self-published made losses of at least £400.

Commenting on the report, Richard Combes, Head of Rights and Licensing at ALCS said: *“The research highlights a familiar paradox: at a time when the creative industries are a thriving mainstay of the UK economy, the industry of individual creators is an increasingly undervalued national resource.”*

*The Business of Being an Author: A Survey of Authors' Earning and Contracts* along with *What are words worth now? Further findings* is available on the ALCS website: [www.alcs.co.uk](http://www.alcs.co.uk)

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### **Definitions**

- Professional Authors: respondents who dedicate over 50% of their time to self-employed writing.
- Authors: respondents who identify their “primary occupation” as author (whether a professional author or an occupational writer).
- Writers: a shorthand for all writers – i.e. respondents to a particular question irrespective of other factors.

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### **Editor's Notes**

- *The Business of Being an Author: A survey of authors' earnings and contracts* was commissioned by ALCS in 2013 and carried out by Queen Mary, University of London. The research authors are Professor Johanna Gibson of Queen Mary University of London; Professor Phillip Johnson of Cardiff University; and Dr Gaetano Dimita of Queen Mary, University of London.
- A total of 2,454 writers took part, of whom 56% were men and 44% women. 17% of respondents were aged 44 or under; 54% were aged 45-64; and 29% were aged 65 or over.

- In 2007, ALCS published *What Are Words Worth?*, independent research by Bournemouth University into authors' earnings for the financial year, 2004/5. Where data for 2005 is cited, this is the research to which it refers.
- The Authors' Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS) collects fees on behalf of the whole spectrum of UK writers: novelists, film & TV script writers; literary prize winners; poets; freelance journalists; translators and adaptors, as well as thousands of professional and academic writers who include nurses, lawyers, teachers, scientists and college lecturers. All writers are eligible to join ALCS: further details on membership can be found at [www.alcs.co.uk](http://www.alcs.co.uk). ALCS collects fees that are difficult, time-consuming or legally impossible for writers and their representatives to claim on an individual basis: money that is nonetheless due to them. Since its inception, ALCS has distributed over £380 million to the nation's writers. For further information, contact [alcs@alcs.co.uk](mailto:alcs@alcs.co.uk) or see [www.alcs.co.uk](http://www.alcs.co.uk).