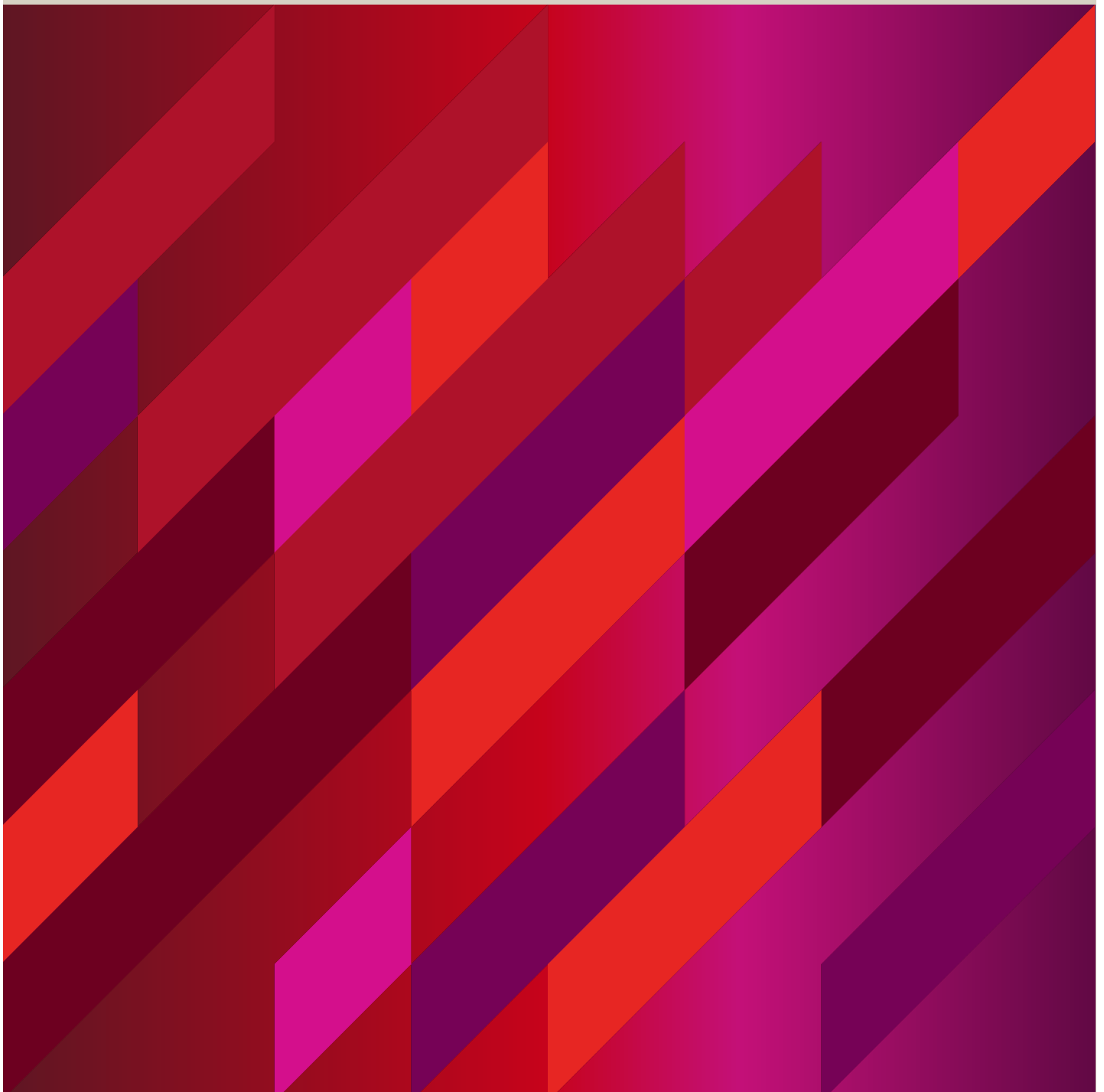


2022 National Survey of Australian Book Authors

Industry Brief No. 3: Authors' Income

November 2022

Jan Zwar, Paul Crosby and David Throsby



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This industry brief is part of a series prepared for Australian book authors and other members of the Australian book industry to highlight key findings of the [2022 National Survey of Australian Book Authors](#) conducted by Jan Zwar, Paul Crosby and David Throsby.

Thank you to all the authors who gave generously of their time and expertise by participating. The complete series of industry briefs about this survey is:

1. *Key Findings*
2. *Demographics*
3. *Authors' Income*
4. *Impact of COVID-19*
5. *Authors' Allocation of Time*
6. *Authors and Publishers*
7. *Rights Sales, Translations and Piracy*
8. *Promotion*

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AUTHORS' AVERAGE GROSS INCOME

Table 1 presents the average gross income for a typical author in the 2020/2021 FY by genre and source of income. The average total income for authors, including all sources of income, is \$64,900. The average income derived from practising as an author is \$18,200 with a very broad spread across the different genre groups. Education authors earned the highest average income from their practice as an author (\$27,300) followed by children's (\$26,800) and genre fiction (\$23,300) authors. Literary authors have a substantially lower average income from their practice as an author (\$14,500), followed by other non-fiction (\$12,100), creative non-fiction authors (\$9,800) and poets (\$5,700).

Table 1 - Average gross income in 2020/2021 financial year: thousand Australian Dollars

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative non-fiction	Other non-fiction	Poetry	Subtotal (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (all authors)
Income from practising as an author	14.5	23.3	26.8	9.8	12.1	5.7	18.4	27.3	10.2	18.2
Advances	3.1	6.9	4.3	2.9	2.0	0.3	4.2	1.1	0.2	4.1
Royalties	4.2	6.6	10.5	1.4	2.6	0.6	5.6	16.9	7.8	5.7
Revenues from self-publishing	0.2	5.3	0.2	0.8	2.0	0.1	2.4	0.2	0.0	2.3
PLR/ELR	0.9	1.5	5.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.8	2.4	0.4	1.8
Copyright payments from CA etc.	0.3	0.2	0.8	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	5.0	0.7	0.5
Grant/Commission	1.1	0.4	0.5	1.0	1.4	1.3	0.8	0.1	0.0	0.8
Payment from an educational institution	0.3	0.3	0.1	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.4
Literary fellowships	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Appearances, reading or other events	0.5	0.6	2.4	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.1	0.0	0.8
Teaching writing workshops	1.2	0.4	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.5
Other publication payments and personal book sales	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.3
Vlogging, blogging and podcasts	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2
Crowd funding	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Salary/wages from working as an author	1.0	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.8	0.6	0.4
Literary prizes	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2
Other income from practising as an author	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.3

Income from another occupation related to writing	18.3	10.5	8.6	10.6	15.2	17.7	13.0	26.2	30.4	13.5
Income from creative practice in another field	3.2	3.2	5.2	5.6	4.3	1.9	3.9	6.2	3.1	3.9
Income from occupation unrelated to writing	16.2	19.4	11.0	16.2	24.2	22.1	18.1	14.0	18.9	18.1
Other income	9.2	9.7	6.5	18.8	10.4	13.2	10.6	9.8	32.5	11.2
Total income	61.4	66.1	58.0	61.0	66.3	60.6	64.0	83.5	95.1	64.9
n	156	409	155	133	161	67	1081	39	32	1152

BREAKDOWN OF AUTHORS' AVERAGE INCOME FROM THEIR PRACTICE AS AN AUTHOR

Still referring to Table 1, we analyse authors' average income from *practising as an author* in detail.

Income from royalties was the largest average sub-category across all authors and the combined sub-total trade authors. The highest average income from royalties across the genres in 2020-2021 was received by education authors (\$16,900), followed by children's (\$10,500), scholarly (\$7,800) and genre fiction (\$6,600) authors. The lowest average income from royalties is by poets (\$600), reflecting the modest size of commercial markets for poetry.

Advances are paid when a publisher contracts with an author to publish a work prior to the provision of the manuscript. The highest average income from advances is earned by authors of genre fiction (\$6,900), followed by children's (\$4,300) and literary fiction authors (\$3,100).

Genre fiction authors, the group with the highest incidence of self-publishing, also report the highest average revenue from self-publishing (\$5,300), substantially higher than any other genre group.

Public Lending Right (PLR) and Educational Lending Right (ELR) payments are made to authors by the Australian government for the use of their works in public libraries and libraries in educational institutions. The highest average revenues from PLR/ELR payments are to children's authors (\$5,700).

The Copyright Agency provides payments to Australian authors whose work is widely copied for use in schools and other educational organisations. Education authors receive the highest average copyright payments from the Copyright Agency and other copyright organisations (\$5,000), followed by children's (\$800) and scholarly (\$700).

Appearances, readings and other events are an important source of income for children's authors (\$2,400), and also poets (\$700), genre fiction and other non-fiction authors (\$600), and literary fiction authors (\$500). The opportunities to earn income from live appearances were significantly reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Turning to other sources of income not related to an author's own creative practice, scholarly authors have the highest average income from another occupation related to writing (\$30,400), followed by education authors (\$26,200), literary authors (\$18,300) and poets (\$17,700).

Education authors have the highest average income from creative practice in another field (\$6,200), followed by creative non-fiction (\$5,600) and children's (\$5,200) authors. Other non-fiction authors have the highest average income from an occupation unrelated to writing (\$18,800).

Changes since the 2015 survey

The results in this section relate to trade authors only; sample sizes for education and scholarly authors are too small for these analyses.

To compare results in the 2015 and 2022 surveys, we have adjusted the 2015 figures for inflation using the Consumer Price Index¹. We find that the average author earnings from their practice as an author has increased from \$14,630 in FY2013/14 to \$18,200 in 2021 but it has gone *down* for literary fiction and non-fiction authors. The largest increases are for children's and then genre fiction authors, followed by slight increases for other non-fiction authors and poets (poets still receive by far the lowest average earnings from their creative practice, at \$5,700 in 2021).

Literary fiction

The financial position of literary authors on average is markedly worse in the 2022 findings than in 2015.

Literary fiction authors have lower average earnings from their practice as an author (\$14,500 in FY2020/21 compared to \$15,400 in FY2013/14) and lower average total income (\$61,400 in FY2020/21 compared to \$65,770 in FY2013/14).

Average income from advances has gone down (from \$4,410 to \$3,100), average royalties are broadly constant (from \$4,630 to \$4,200), as is average income from self-publishing (\$230 to \$200). Average PLR/ELR payments are up from a modest base (\$570 to \$900), as are average copyright payments from CA (\$100 to \$300).

Genre Fiction

Genre fiction authors' average income from practising as an author, and their total average income both increased.

The average income from practising as an author was up (\$23,300 in FY2020/21 compared to \$17,780 in FY2013/14) and average total income increased (\$66,100 in FY2020/21 compared to \$62,830 in FY2013/14).

The average increases were spread across various sub-categories, with notable increases in royalties and income from self-publishing. Average income from advances has gone up (from \$6,200 to \$6,900), average royalties are up (from \$5,030 to \$6,600), as is average income from self-publishing (\$3,004 to \$5,300). Average PLR/ELR payments are up from a modest base (\$1,290 to \$1,500), as are average copyright payments from the Copyright Agency (\$120 to \$200).

Genre fiction sales increased during the pandemic, and the figures above likely reflect this. It's also possible that the increased sales of books by best-selling genre-fiction authors have lifted the average earnings of this category as a whole.

Children's

Children's authors' average income increased the most of any genre group covered by this survey. The average income from practising as an author was up (\$26,800 in FY2020/21 compared to \$17,200 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation) and average total income increased (\$58,000 in FY2020/21 compared to \$53,590 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation).

¹ Monetary amounts from the earlier survey are listed in this report at 2021-22 prices.

Average income from advances was approximately constant (\$4,450 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation compared to \$4,300 in FY2020/21). Average earnings from royalties showed a sharp increase from \$2,930 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation to \$10,500 in FY2020/21.

However, the average total income for children’s authors was the lowest for all the genre groups. As such, there is both positive and negative news regarding average earnings for children’s authors. It’s possible, too, that increased sales of books by best-selling children’s authors have lifted the average earnings of this category as a whole, or that a greater proportion of children’s authors work part-time.

Table 2 - Comparison of trade authors’ average gross income in 2013/14 and 2020/21 financial years: thousand Australian Dollars

	Literary Fiction		Genre Fiction		Children's		Creative Non-fiction		Other Non-fiction		Poetry		Sub-total (trade)	
	(2015 - adj infl)	2021	(2015 - adj infl)	2021	(2015 - adj infl)	2021	(2015 - adj infl)	2021	(2015 - adj infl)	2021	(2015 - adj infl)	2021	(2015 - adj infl)	2021
Income from practising as an author	15.14	14.5	17.78	23.3	17.20	26.8	14.27	9.8	10.76	12.1	4.68	5.7	14.63	18.4
Income from another occupation related to writing	21.24	18.3	8.66	10.5	9.48	8.6	13.57	10.6	13.81	15.2	20.48	17.7	12.99	13.0
Income from creative practice in another field	2.60	3.2	6.32	3.2	3.74	5.2	1.64	5.6	4.68	4.3	2.46	1.9	4.33	3.9
Income from occupation unrelated to writing	19.78	16.2	22.93	19.4	14.27	11.0	18.49	16.2	25.27	24.2	20.48	22.1	20.94	18.1
Other income	7.01	9.2	7.02	9.7	8.89	6.5	19.77	18.8	11.70	10.4	11.47	13.2	10.06	10.6
Total income	65.77	61.4	62.83	66.1	53.59	58.0	67.86	61.0	66.34	66.3	59.67	60.6	62.95	64.0
<i>n</i>	87	156	276	409	98	155	95	133	98	161	85	67	739	1081

Creative non-fiction

The financial position of creative non-fiction authors on average is notably worse in the 2022 findings than in 2015.

Creative non-fiction authors have lower average earnings from their practice as an author (\$9,800 in FY2020/21 compared to \$14,270 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation) and lower average total income (\$61,000 in FY2020/21 compared to \$67,860 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation). Average income from advances was up from \$1,400 to \$2,900, but this was not enough to offset other decreases such as a reduction in average income from royalties from \$3,860 to \$1,400.

Other non-fiction

The average income of other non-fiction authors from their practice as an author was up slightly from \$14,270 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation compared to \$9,800 in FY2020/21. Their average total income was roughly constant (\$66,340 in FY2013/14 and \$66,300 in FY2020/21).

Poetry

The average income of poets from their practice as an author was up slightly from \$4,680 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation compared to \$5,700 in FY2020/21. However, there was a decline in poet's income from another occupation related to writing from \$20,480 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation to \$17,700 in FY2020/21, and a slight decline in income from creative practice in another field (from \$2,460 in FY2013/14 to \$1,900).

There was a small increase in income from an occupation unrelated to being a writer (from \$20,480 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation, to \$22,100 in 2021) and other income (from \$11,470 in FY2013/14 adjusted for inflation to \$13,200 in FY2020/21).

The data could show a shift by poets from income sources related to being a writer and creative practice in another field to other income sources. It could be in response to a decrease in income opportunities related to the pandemic, but there are other possible interpretations of the data too. For example, an overall attempt to maintain income levels as some opportunities related to income from writing or other creative practice decreased. It's worth noting the very modest figures here, both relating to income for poet's creative work and the various other income categories that contribute to average income. Their average total income was roughly constant (\$59,670 in FY2013/14 and \$60,600 in FY2020/21).

OTHER SOURCES OF AUTHORS' INCOME

Table 3 presents the other sources of income that authors rely on in addition to their own earnings. Roughly two-fifths of authors rely on the income of their partner and/or a job that is unrelated to being an author, and one-fifth rely on a job that is related to being an author but does not directly lead to the production of a creative work. Approximately one-sixth of authors rely on unemployment benefits or other government benefits, and one-tenth nominated credit card debt.

Changes since the 2015 survey

These findings are broadly consistent with the 2015 survey findings. The income of an author's partner remains the most-nominated source of money to make ends meet (37.3% in 2015 and 41.8% in 2022). A job that is unrelated to being an author fell from 47.3% in 2015 to 38.9% in 2022, and a job that is related to being an author but does not lead to the production of a creative work fell from 25.7% of authors in 2015 to 20.8% in 2022. It is possible that these sources of additional income were more difficult to obtain during the pandemic.

Table 3 - During the 2020/21 FY did you rely on any of these sources of money to make ends meet? (If appropriate please choose more than one option)

	%
The income of your partner	41.8
The income of a family member or friend	3.1
Loans from a family member or friend	3.1
Short term loans from a financial institution	1.0
Small business loan from a financial institution	0.2
Credit card debt	9.2
A job that is unrelated to being an author	38.9
A job that is related to being an author but does not directly lead to the production of a creative work	20.8
Unemployment benefit/s or other govt. benefits	16.5
Other	28.3
<i>n</i>	1152

AUTHORS WHO EARN MORE THAN THE AVERAGE AUSTRALIAN WEEKLY INCOME INCLUDING ALL SOURCES OF INCOME

To investigate the broad range of authors' income, we analyse data for authors whose total income is higher than the average Australian annual income of \$70,000 in the 2020-21 FY.

Table 4 shows that one-third of authors earn an average annual income or more. This includes half or more education and scholarly authors, and one-third of trade authors. However, approximately two-thirds of all trade authors earned less than the average annual income for this period, taking into account all sources of income.

Table 4 - Proportion of authors with total income greater than the average Australian weekly income in the 2020/21 FY (percent)

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative Non-Fiction	Other Non-Fiction	Poetry	Subtotal (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (all authors)
> 70,000	33.3	35.5	29.7	30.8	34.8	31.3	33.4	48.7	56.3	34.5
> 101,000	15.4	22.0	16.1	15.8	24.2	16.4	19.4	35.9	37.5	20.5
> 200,000	4.5	7.1	4.5	3.0	3.7	1.5	5.0	7.7	12.5	5.3
<i>n</i>	156	409	155	133	161	67	1081	39	32	1152

Next, we consider authors who earn \$101,000 or more in the 2020/21 FY. Once again, the highest proportion in this band of income is among scholarly (37.5%) and education (35.9%) authors. This is followed by other non-fiction authors (24.2%) and genre fiction authors (22%).

Finally, in relation to Table 4, we examine the proportion of authors in the highest income band of \$200,000+, taking into account all sources of income. The highest presentation is by scholarly authors (12.5%). This is followed by education (7.7%) and genre fiction (7.1%) authors.

FUNDING APPLICATIONS AND SUCCESS

We asked authors whether they apply for funding through grants to support their creative work, and if so, whether they are successful. Table 5 shows that approximately three-quarters of authors rely on

other forms of income to support their creative work. Literary fiction authors, poets and children’s authors are the most likely to apply for grants. Due to the competitive nature of such funding, relatively few are always successful (less than 2%).

Table 5 - Funding applications and success: percent in each genre

	Literary Fiction	Genre Fiction	Children's	Creative non-fiction	Other non-fiction	Poetry	Subtotal (trade)	Education	Scholarly	Total (all authors)
Applied and always received	0.6	2.7	1.3	0.8	0.6	6.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	1.7
Applied and sometimes received	23.7	7.1	16.1	12.8	13.7	17.9	13.1	5.1	6.3	12.7
Applied and never received	15.4	7.3	12.3	9.8	3.7	9.0	9.1	0.0	0.0	8.5
Did not apply	60.3	82.9	70.3	76.7	82.0	67.2	75.9	94.9	93.8	77.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
n	156	409	155	133	161	67	1081	39	32	1152

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

These findings reflect the diverse circumstances of Australian authors. Authors’ income must be considered in the broader context of whether they work full-time or part-time in their profession as an author or in combination with another occupation, how established they are in their career as an author, and the market characteristics of the genres in which they publish or are published.

Approximately one-third of authors earned the average annual income for the Australian workforce in the 2020-21 FY, down from approximately 43% in the 2013-14 FY. Approximately one-quarter of authors work full-time as an author (see *Industry Brief No. 2: Demographics*, Table 1).

These findings can be read in relation to *Industry Brief No. 5: Authors’ Allocation of Time*. Authors reported working longer average total hours in 2022 compared to 2015 and they maintained the average time they allocated to writing, but the findings show that the results are mixed in terms of income. Some groups reported increases but in other cases, the average income from authors’ creative practice has plateaued or gone down. Overall, authors’ income from their creative work remains low, particularly compared to similarly educated professionals in other occupations.

For the majority of authors, it appears that multiple sources of income from their profession as an author and other sources of income are necessary. Earning a total income comparable to the average annual Australian income remains challenging.