

Freelance designers in the UK

There are over 65,000 freelance designers in the UK. Their numbers have increased significantly since 2005 (by almost 40%) this means that more than a quarter of designers in the UK now work as freelances. This growth in numbers has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in fee incomes: overall fee incomes for freelances total £3.6bn, an increase of 22% since 2005. Total fee income for freelance designers is low compared to total fee income for design consultancies, but overall more freelance designers have seen their fee income increase than decrease year on year. One in ten freelance designers has set up on their own in the last year and overall freelance design businesses are younger than design consultancies or in-house design teams.

Number of freelance designers in the UK

How many freelance designers are there in the UK?

There are 65,900¹ freelance designers in the UK. This is an increase of 39% since 2005.

Profile of freelance designers in the UK

What disciplines do freelance designers work in?

Just over 60% of freelance designers work in communications design and just under half work in digital and multimedia design. The number of freelance designers working in product and industrial design has decreased by 13% since 2005.

	Freelance designers '05	Freelance designers '09	All UK design businesses '09
Communications	58%	61%	62%
Digital & multimedia	43%	49%	48%
Interior and exhibition	23%	15%	16%
Product and industrial	22%	9%	11%
Fashion and textiles	10%	2%	2%
Service design	3%	1%	1%
Other	2%	2%	3%

How long have UK freelance designers been operating for?

A significant proportion of freelances have not been in business long. More than 40% of them have been operating for three years or less and approximately one in ten freelance designers have been operating for less than 12 months.

	Freelance designers '09	All UK design businesses '09
Less than 12 months	11%	9%
1–3 years	31%	28%
4–6 years	25%	23%
7–10 years	14%	14%
11–15 years	6%	7%
15 years plus	14%	19%

Where are UK freelance designers based?

London and the South East are home to the largest proportion of freelance designers.

	Freelance designers '09	All UK design businesses '09
London	24%	23%
South East	16%	17%
East	10%	10%
West Midlands	9%	8%
Yorkshire and the Humber	7%	7%
North West	7%	7%
Scotland	7%	7%
South West	7%	7%
East Midlands	5%	6%
Northern Ireland	4%	3%
Wales	3%	3%
North East	1%	2%

¹ Source: Labour Force Survey 2008

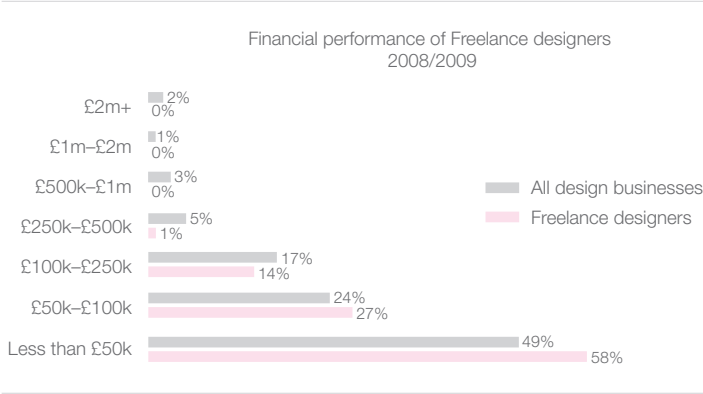
Financial performance of UK freelance designers

What is the collective fee income of freelance designers in the UK?

The total annual fee income of UK freelance designers was estimated to be £3.6bn for the last financial year. This is a 22% increase (adjusted for inflation) on 2005.

What was the fee income of UK freelance designers for the last financial year?

Almost 60% of freelance designers have an annual fee income of less than £50k.



How does the fee income of freelance designers for the last financial year compare with the year before?

More than a quarter (26%) of freelance designers experienced a decrease in their fee income last year compared to 38% who experienced an increase.

	Freelance designers '09	All UK design businesses '09
Substantial decrease	7%	7%
Moderate decrease	19%	19%
No change	15%	16%
Moderate increase	32%	31%
Substantial increase	6%	6%
Don't know	21%	22%

Has the size of freelance designers' client base changed over the last three years?

More than half of freelance designers have increased the number of clients that they work for over the last three years.

- 55% have experienced an increase in the number of clients
- 22% have experienced a decrease in the number of clients
- 18% have experienced no change in the number of clients

How do freelance designers expect their fee income to change over the next year?

Freelance designers are optimistic about their financial prospects for the year ahead.

	Freelance designers '09	All UK design businesses '09
Substantial decrease	2%	2%
Moderate decrease	10%	10%
No change	15%	18%
Moderate increase	51%	47%
Substantial increase	12%	11%
Don't know	11%	12%

How much of freelance designers' fee income comes from new clients?

On average, 44% of freelances fee income for the last financial year came from new clients. By comparison, 35% of design consultancies' annual fee income for the last financial year came from new clients.

Clients and competition for UK freelance designers

What percentage of UK freelances work for the private, public and third sectors?

Just under half of freelance designers work for public sector clients. One in five work for clients in the third sector.

	Freelance designers '09	All UK design businesses '09
Private sector clients	96%	93%
Public sector clients	47%	47%
Third sector clients	21%	21%

Which industry sectors do UK freelance designers work for?

Freelance designers are most likely to work for clients in the business services and financial sector.

	Freelance designers '09	All UK design businesses '09
Business services, Financial	42%	40%
Wholesale/retail	30%	28%
Public administration, Health, Education	26%	28%
Manufacturing	23%	24%
Hotels, Transport, Communications	17%	17%
Construction, Utilities	10%	10%
Agriculture, Mining	2%	2%
Other	36%	33%

Where are freelance designers' main clients located?

Freelance designers are less likely than design consultancies or in-house design teams to do work abroad. Almost all freelance designers work predominantly for clients based in the UK.

- 95% of UK freelance designers' main clients are based in the UK
- 4% of UK freelance designers' main clients are based in the EU
- 1% of UK freelance designers' clients are based outside the EU

Where does freelance designers' competition come from?

Less than 10% of freelance designers' competition comes from overseas.

- 89% of UK freelance designers say their main competition comes from within the UK
- 4% of UK freelance designers say their main competition comes from within the EU
- 7% of UK freelance designers say their main competition comes from outside of the EU

How has competition for freelance designers changed over the last three years?

The majority of freelance designers say that competition for work has increased over the last three years.

- 21% of UK freelance designers say there has been no change in their competition
- 70% of UK freelance designers think competition has increased
- 10% of UK freelance designers think competition had decreased.