

Scientific or Technical Illustrator

Scientific or technical illustrators produce highly detailed images to show how things look or work for textbooks, brochures, instruction manuals, training materials and technical websites. They present technical, scientific or medical information that makes it clearer or easier for people to understand.

They may specialise in one area such as science, botany, engineering or medicine.

The Work

You could be:

- meeting clients, editors, authors or designers to discuss the project requirements (or brief), and suitable illustrations and layouts
- researching sources for reference
- studying an item to decide how best to illustrate it – it could be the controls of a car, part of a computer, a new kettle, or parts of an aircraft
- hand drawing, painting or using computer graphics software to produce illustrations
- producing detailed artwork for medical textbooks, such as how the skeletal system works or cross sections of human organs
- creating posters or promotional material for pharmaceutical companies or for health information
- using specialist computer software to produce 3D models and graphics
- working to meet budgets and deadlines
- if you are self-employed, keeping admin and account records and negotiating contracts.

Pay

Pay rates vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Starting salaries for qualified scientific and technical illustrators in the UK tend to be around £25,000 a year. With experience this can rise to £42,000 a year or more.

You might work for the NHS. Medical Illustrators usually start on Band 5, £34,494 to £42,977 a year. Senior posts may be up to Band 6, £43,169 to £52,603 a year. The current pay scales are from April 2025.

A lot of illustrators work freelance. They charge a fee for each job, which varies depending on the work. The better known they are, the more they can charge. An average might be £25 an hour.

If you sell your work through an agent, you need to pay the agent a fee. This could be as much as a third of the selling price.

Conditions

- You would work alone most of the time, in a studio, an office, or from home.
- You may visit factories and other places to see the items to be illustrated.
- Hours may be long, particularly where there is a deadline to meet.

Getting In

- You usually need a relevant HND (SCQF Level 8) or degree (SCQF Level 9-10) such as clinical photography, graphic design, illustration or art and design, preferably with a specialism in technical or medical illustration.
- For entry to an HND you need 1-2 Highers, for a degree, 3-5 Highers, normally including English and Art and Design.
- You need a very good portfolio of art and design work to get into college or university.
- If you are very talented and have a really good portfolio, you might get into college or university without the necessary Highers.
- In Scotland there are three postgraduate courses accredited by the Institute of Medical Illustrators (IMI): the MSc in Medical Art offered by the University of Dundee, and the MSc in Medical Visualisation and Human Anatomy, offered jointly by the University of Glasgow and the Glasgow School of Art.

For art school courses you need to apply through UCAS.

There is great competition for few full time jobs, with bodies such as scientific or technical publishers, government departments, the NHS or manufacturers. Many illustrators are self-employed or work freelance. They get work from scientific and technical publishers, advertising agencies and broadcasting agencies, as well as architects, pharmaceutical companies, engineering firms and contractors.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- excellent drawing skills
- for technical illustration, a keen interest in science and technology
- for medical illustration, knowledge of biology, anatomy and physiology
- skills in using specialist design software, such as CAD or 3D packages
- good observational skills and a good eye for detail, design and colour
- a precise and accurate approach to working
- a good imagination, to decide on suitable illustrations
- the ability to work under pressure to meet deadlines
- for technical illustration, the ability to read and interpret technical drawings.

You also need to have:

- patience and good concentration skills
- good communication skills
- confidence and self-motivation

- business skills, if you are self-employed.

Training

- Training is through experience, on the job.
- The Association of Illustrators runs training events and seminars for members.
- To keep up to date, you could take short, part time courses in new design software packages.
- Medical illustrators could take the part time postgraduate diploma offered by the [Medical Artist's Educational Trust](#). This takes 2-5 years to complete while working. Successful completion leads to professional membership of the Medical Artist's Association of Great Britain.

Getting On

- There are not many chances of promotion.
- You are more likely to work freelance. This is not always easy and you might need to take another job to add to your income.

Contacts

Institute of Medical Illustrators

Website: www.imi.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/amidotorg

Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC)

Tel: 020 8253 4506

Email: istc@istc.org.uk

Website: www.istc.org.uk

Medical Artists' Association of Great Britain

Email: secretary@maa.org.uk

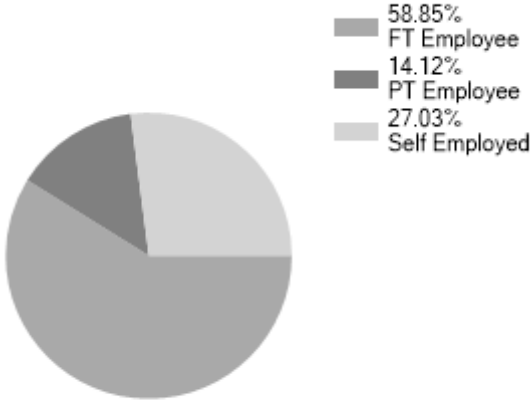
Website: www.maa.org.uk

X: @MAAofGB

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MAAofGB

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

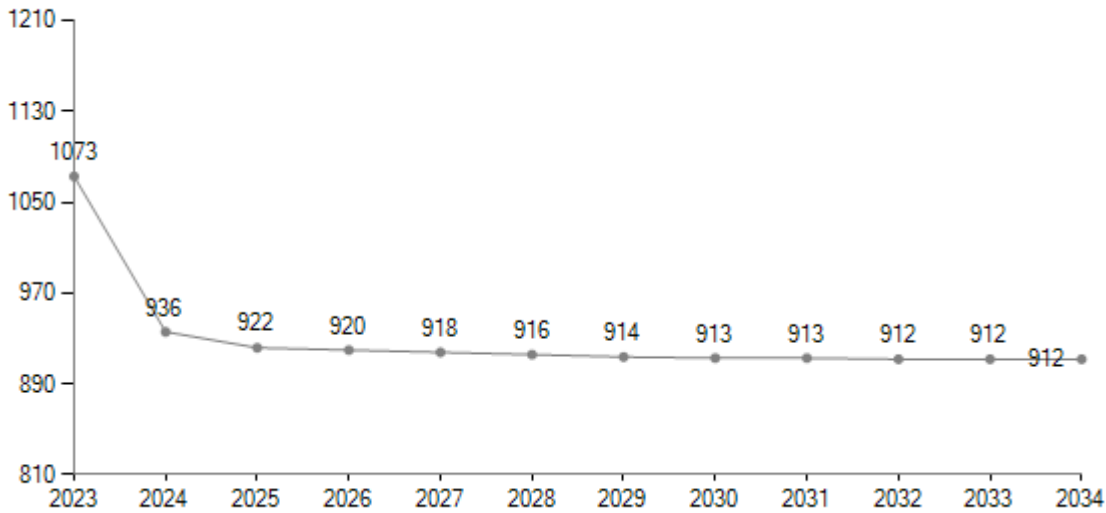


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)