

AOI Annual Report



October 2020 – September 2021

Chair's Summary

I am delighted to write this introduction to this AOI annual report for 2020/21
This has been yet another successful year for us.

We have succeeded in retaining our membership base despite the most difficult of circumstances with the global pandemic hitting all parts of society and the economy, and in such a serious way.

We believe this is because we have focussed increasingly on the key challenges of providing a professional, relevant, and friendly service to our members, who continue to rate our services so highly.

We are all too aware of the challenges that the current war in Europe with the associated cost of living crisis means for our members. We are working hard to ensure that our services are of real and growing value to our members considering these unexpected and unwanted developments. Equally, we are continuing to champion the causes of inclusivity and equality throughout our industry.

Since the end of the 2021/2 financial year, we have seen the departure of our much-valued CEO, Ren Renwick, who has been so instrumental in the growth of the AOI. I am delighted that Ren has decided to stay on as a Director of the AOI.

Ren has been succeeded by Rachel Hill as CEO. Rachel was formerly our Director of Membership and so has been able to hit the ground running in her new role.

Finally, I would like to thank all the highly valued members of our Board and our outstanding Executive team for all the skill, dedication, and hard work in getting the AOI to be the robust and widely respected organisation we are today. This stands us in good stead to deal with all the challenges we know lie ahead.

David Gilbert
Chair



MEMBERSHIP

Our membership stayed stable this financial year, decreasing only slightly from 2830 to 2750. The ability to retain membership throughout the pandemic has been a significant achievement for the AOI team, reflective of their commitment to adapting our offering based on the changing needs of our members over the past year.

The AOI aimed to offer members a safe place for support and guidance through an uncertain climate. Our helpdesk responded to around 7,500 enquiries, covering a broad range of topics including licencing, contracts, copyright, and self-promotion.

Our driving goals throughout the year were to **support**, **empower** and **connect** illustrators. We placed a particular focus on students and emerging artists, helping them engage with industry and peers at a time when networking opportunities were limited.



Supporting Members

Developing AOI Resources

Covid continued to have a detrimental financial impact on our members, with 70% reporting a decrease in income. It became more important than ever that illustrators had the resources and information necessary to protect and diversify their careers.

We launched a range of new member-exclusive resources, based on growing helpdesk trends, including:

- Diversifying your income as an illustrator
- Navigating customs and tax post Brexit
- Challenging copyright assignments and Creative Commons licenses
- Understanding NFTs as an illustrator

We also reviewed and improved our existing catalogue of AOI resources. This process involved:

- Working with TLC (web developers) and William Luz (freelance illustrator) to redesign the presentation of our resources.
- Reviewing resource content to ensure all advice was up to date and in line with industry expectations.
- Commissioning a copywriter to make the language clearer and more accessible.



Graduate Support Scheme

We worked closely with universities throughout the year, to better understand the needs of graduating students who had spent large portions of their studies in lockdown. We initiated the Graduate Support Scheme in the summer on 2021, allowing universities to gift AOI memberships to their graduating students to offer ongoing education and support as they start their illustration careers. This is an ongoing initiative that we hope to grow.

Empowering Members

College Masterclasses

This year we delivered Illustration Business Masterclasses to a record number of Universities across the UK (46 in total), giving 1800 students the tools needed to kickstart their careers with confidence. As we were still delivering masterclasses online, we revised the format to include interactive elements to engage the students throughout. Feedback from students and staff has been extremely positive.



Complete Guide to Freelance Illustration Course

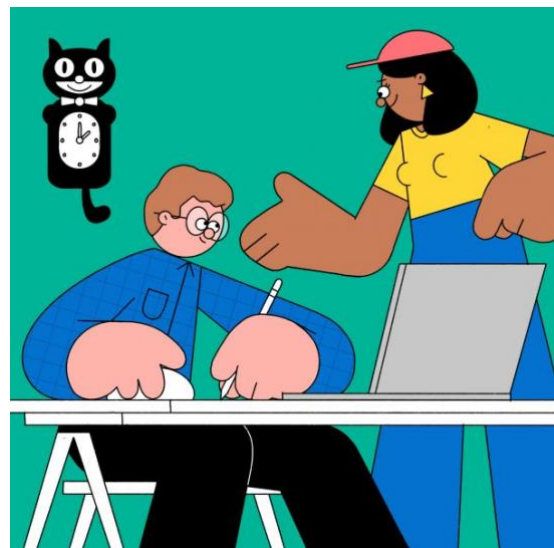
Over the year we delivered the second and third editions of the 'Complete Guide', a six-part course covering various areas of business practice. Both editions sold out quickly, indicating an appetite for this format of the event. In an industry that can often feel isolating, this course was designed to share information, build confidence, and form a lasting support network amongst attendees.

Connecting Members

Mentorship Scheme

In 2021 the AOI mentorship ran for its second year, growing from 4 to 14 mentees. The scheme offered 6 months' worth of mentorship to underrepresented artists, tailored to their own professional goals and aspirations.

This year we organised additional training for the mentors, including a session with Professional Coach, Sarah Cartwright. Many thanks to the mentors who volunteered their time and expertise.



Illo Grad Network

Over the summer of 2021, we spoke to a range of new graduates, who highlighted worries such as graduating during a pandemic, not knowing how to get started, or where to find a support system. In response, we developed a tailored community events programme, consisting of 4 informative, social events hosted by Dave Bain.

Meet Ups

Our volunteer-led 'Meet Ups' continued to bring local communities together online throughout the pandemic. Dave Bain (freelance illustrator) was hired as our Meet-Ups coordinator, successfully leading the expansion of illustrator networks across the UK. We also established a new 'thematic' group for illustrators who work in Children's Publishing. Thanks are due to our wonderful Meetup coordinator volunteers.



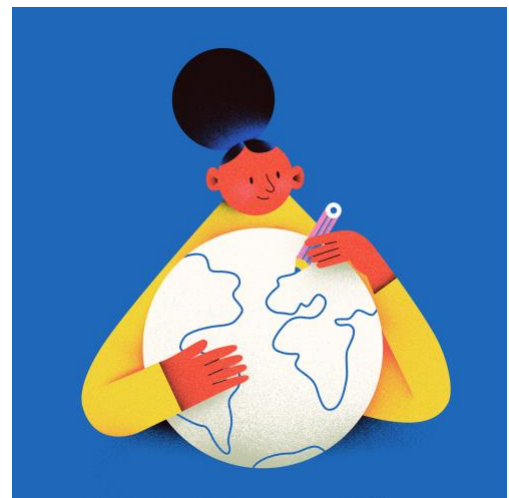
Walker Events

We collaborated with Walker Books on two well-attended panel discussion events, exploring the relationship between an author/illustrator and their Art Director. Speakers included Jon Klassen, Ann Stott, Chris Haughton, and Deirdre McDermott. The format allowed illustrators to ask questions and engage with notable speakers.

Communications

Marianna Madriz moved to the new role of Communications Coordinator in January 2021, successfully engaging with a wider community of illustrators through our various partnerships and marketing platforms.

Our social media reach continued to grow to over 155,000 followers across the three platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).



DIVERSITY & EQUALITY

The AOI is committed to challenging ourselves and others to ensure an equal, diverse industry that we can all be proud of.



Roundtable Events

Throughout the year we hosted a series of roundtable discussions focusing on equality, diversity, and inclusivity in illustration. These valuable conversations were designed to help inform actions in this area.

Stemming from these discussions, the AOI introduced a series of 'Drawing Diversity' workshops, hosted by AOI board member Montana Forbes, exploring how illustrators can depict a more inclusive range of people in their own illustration practice.

Agents for Change

The AOI also became members of Agents for change, a group of illustration Agents looking to actively diversify the illustration industry and support underrepresented artists. Together the group have launched a range of initiatives, including portfolio consultations and self-promotion opportunities for a broad range of BAME illustrators.

Working with Disabled Illustrator's Resource

Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 3LA info@theaoi.com www.theaoi.com
social media: @theaoi



The AOI developed an in-depth written resource for commissioners, on how to best support disabled illustrators. This resource was shared at a roundtable for disabled illustrators, who offered valuable feedback and insights before its launch.

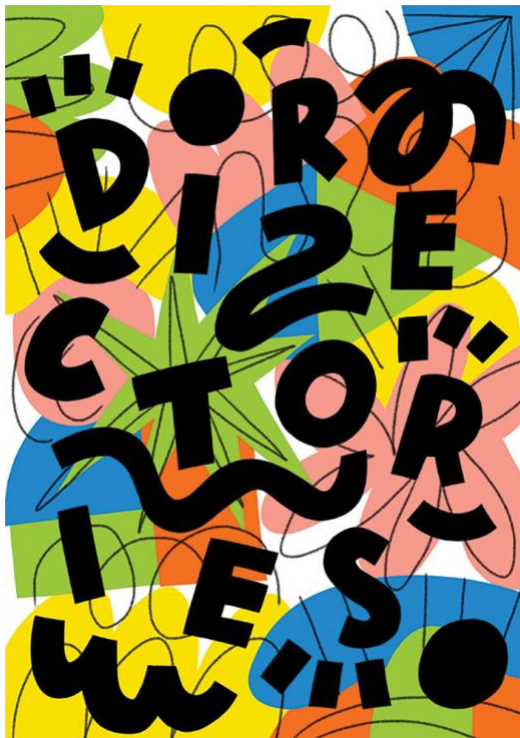
Public Speaking Workshop

The AOI ran a subsidized negotiation and public speaking workshop for underrepresented illustrators, which received very positive feedback.

Internal Policies

Internally, we reviewed our own EDI policies, and have permanently included Equality and Diversity as an agenda item in all AOI development meetings.

PUBLICATIONS



Directories

We updated our directories, which are listings of commissioners across the Editorial, Advertising and Publishing industries. This year we worked with freelancer Hannah Clare Gordon, to broaden our network and ensure we remained GDPR compliant.

Sales were positive, with 288 directories sold in total. A discounted rate was offered to AOI members.

Illustrator's Guide to Law and Business Practice

The Illustrator's Guide to Law and Business Practice remains a popular printed publication for the AOI. This year the content was updated with the help of Robert Lands. The updated edition was then made available for sale in digital format.

VAROOM

During the pandemic, Varoom was reduced to 1 issue per year. Olivia Ahmad continued as Editor of Varoom, working with Derek Brazell on our final issue - Varoom 42 (Intimacy). From pandemic editorials to the body-based illustration of make-up artists, this issue explored several perspectives on intimacy in the last year of image-making.

Varoom 42 was designed by Fraser Muggeridge studio and with a cover illustration by Hannah Buckman.

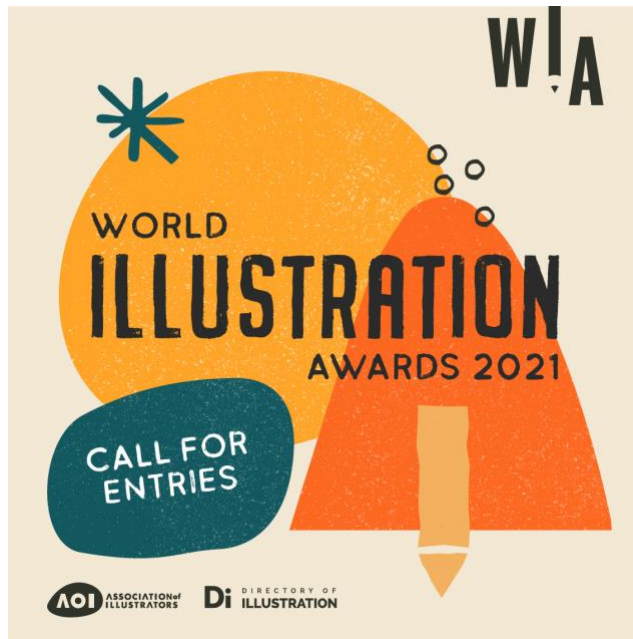
After careful consideration, the AOI took the difficult decision to cease publication of Varoom magazine later this year. This decision has been taken following feedback from our latest members' survey, requesting more interactive content, practical business advice and industry manuals.

Varoom has had great success over the past 15 years and is celebrated as an important part of AOI history. We would like to thank all of the incredible contributions made by illustrators and writers throughout the past 42 issues. We look forward to evolving our offering alongside our member's needs, through the launch of our new seasonal suite of content – Inside Illustration.



AWARDS

In a year filled with challenges, the World Illustration Awards 2021 celebrated the exceptional creativity and resilience of illustrators from across the world.



Entrants

A record number of illustrators entered an extraordinary 5,280 entries to WIA2021. This was an increase from the previous year of 20% for entries and 12% for entrants. This is a testament to the profile and quality of WIA, as illustrators sought opportunities for exposure and visibility after many had found their incomes and networks diminished by the pandemic.

Nearly 1000 entries were made by active members taking advantage of a 20% discount for AOI members.

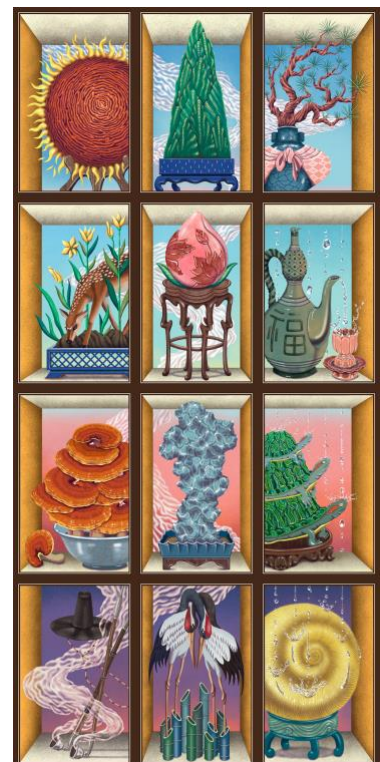
WIA Bursary

We introduced a bursary scheme for UK and USA entrants who otherwise would be unable to pay to enter. 40 artists were supported to enter their work. Two of these projects were longlisted and one was shortlisted.

Promotion and Benefits

A greater proportion of entrants than ever before benefitted from having their entries shared during the call for entries stage on our ever-growing WIA Instagram account, with 29.5k+ followers.

This year we enhanced the entrant experience, by offering exclusive resources and video content to help them get the most out of entering the competition. Shortlisted illustrators had the chance to meet and network during a series of social events. They also had access to a free self-promotion webinar.



A final highlight of the year is the publication of the comprehensive WIA2021 catalogue, which is released in digital and print versions. It features all 200 shortlisted projects and is distributed to illustrators, agents and commissioners worldwide.

Showcase and Awards Night

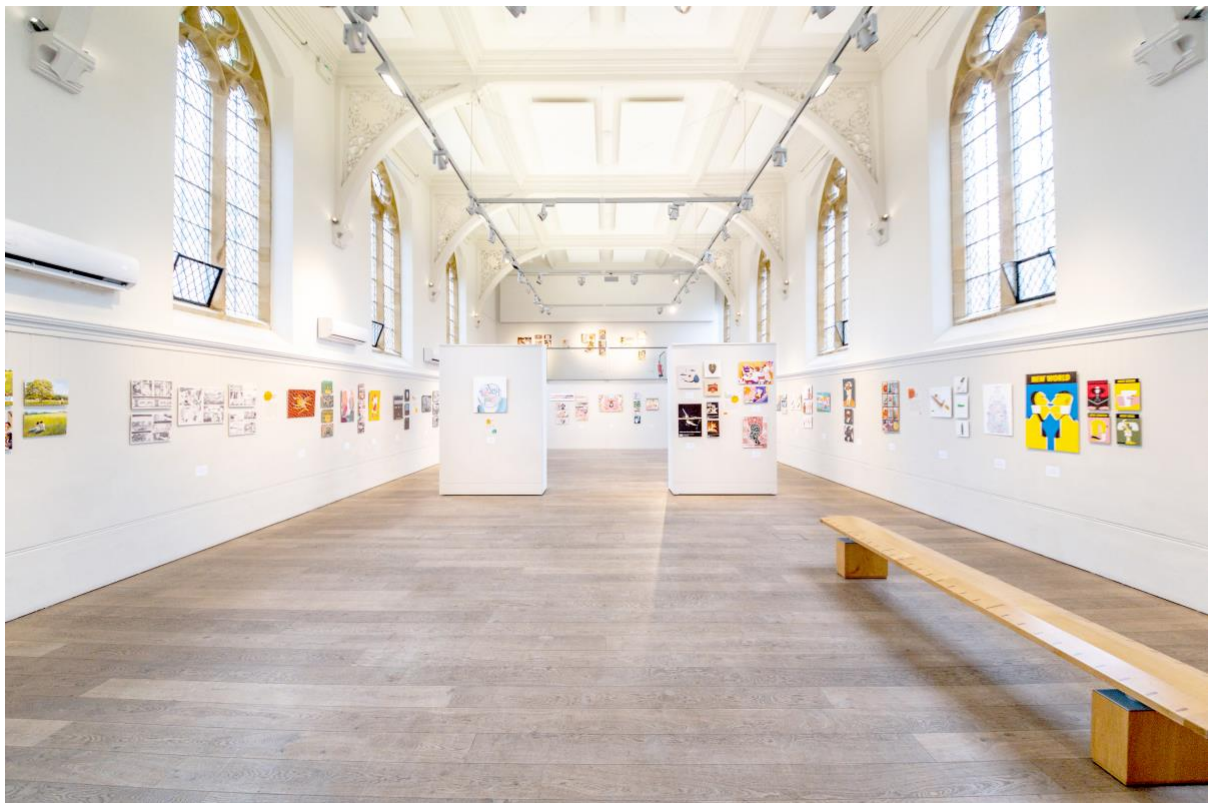
The Showcase platform was refreshed and improved with newly designed pages, creating a mini-site and pop-up windows to create a rich and inspiring digital exhibition for illustrators and industry to explore.

The WIA2021 celebrations culminated in an all-new online Awards Night event, using the Hopin platform, featuring announcements from judges, sponsors, and special guest Axel Scheffler. The evening was completed with networking opportunities, drink & draw and meet-up sessions.

International Tour

Our ongoing relationship with the Shenzhen Illustration Association sees the winning projects exhibited in major cities across China. We plan to develop more touring opportunities in other countries too to reflect the international reach of the awards. The WIA2021 Exhibition was also displayed in Tonbridge, here in the UK.

We received excellent press coverage from high-profile UK news outlets, such as The Guardian, specialist publications including Design Week, Bookseller and Creative Boom.



CAMPAIGNING

Legislation

We continued to make submissions to the government on the illustration communities' behalf, most notably campaigning for the **Self Employed Income Support Scheme** to be extended and re-modelled to support the full breadth of illustrators financially affected by the pandemic. We were swift and robust in communicating the concerns of illustrators to relevant committees, including the Treasury and DCMS. Our Covid Surveys provided vital evidence in these submissions and captured the impact of Covid on our industry.

We worked with the Society of Authors, Creative Rights Alliance and ACLS to amplify our voice and ensure concerns were heard. We joined a wider group led by ACLS calling for the establishment of a UK Creators Council.

Industry Engagement

The AOI also continued to liaise with orgs offering inappropriate terms and prizes for their competitions aimed at visual creators. Working directly with organizers, we were able to successfully remove copyright assignments from T&Cs and establish fair monetary prizes for competition winners. This outreach work is ongoing, as new competitions arise.

Partnerships



The European Illustration Forum

The AOI was voted as president of The European Illustration Forum for a third consecutive term. We continued to lead this group of professional bodies in sharing resources, collecting data and understanding a pan-European view of the impact of Covid 19. In December 2020 the EIF released an advocacy guide for freelance illustrators, called the Ninja Guide. This resource developed by the Spanish association, then translated and amplified through the work of the EIF.

Creative Rights Alliance

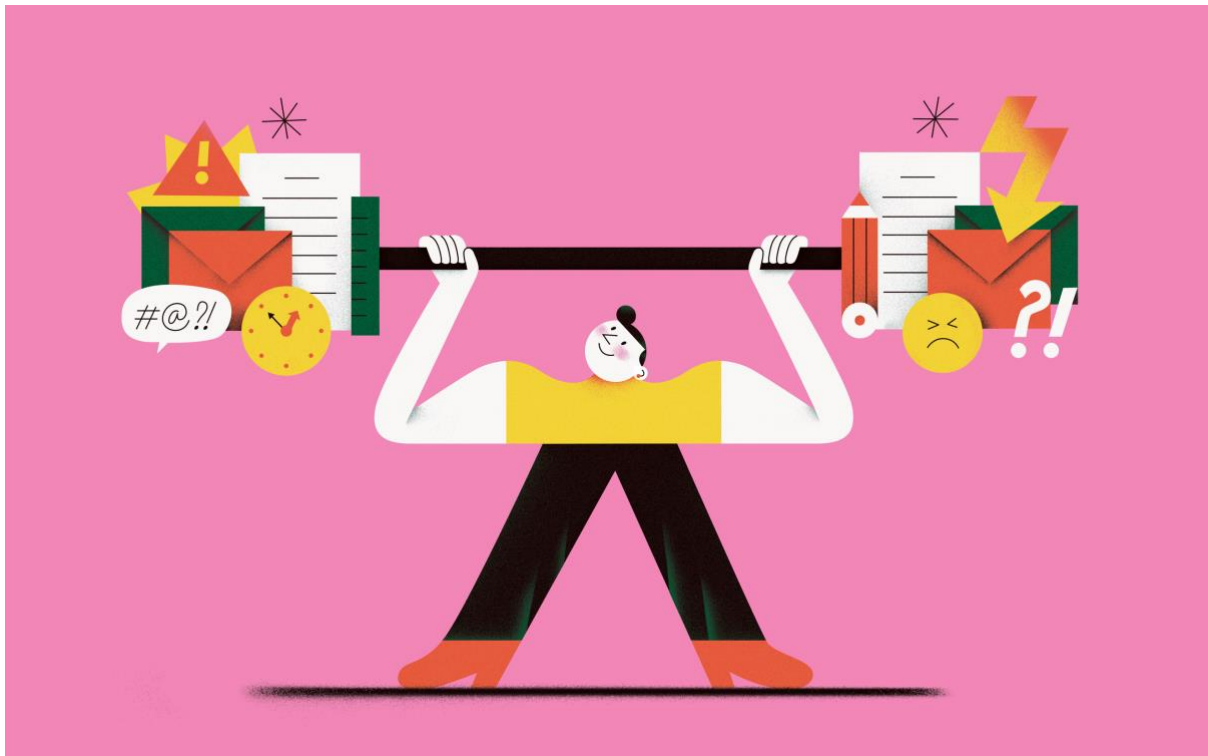
The AOI remains an active Board member of the Creative Rights Alliance, and our organization has been instrumental in getting a website developed and approved. This year we also supported the recruitment of a paid staff member to lead the administrative and operational work of the group.

British Copyright Council

We joined the British Copyright Council's 'Copyright Education and Awareness Working Group', allowing us to not only enhance and contribute to the great work this group does but to ensure illustrators' voices are heard in these conversations.

ADMINISTRATION

As the AOI continued to grow, we reviewed and tightened many of our internal practices around data protection. Our staff completed cyber security training. We established a quarterly reporting audit for our website and agreed on a formal and thorough Incident Response Plan with our website developers, TLC.



We also welcomed Tania Duarte as our Membership Administrator, who has done excellent work streamlining membership processes and neatening up our database. Over the next 12 months, we plan to scale our CRM systems to ensure we are efficiently supporting our evolving community.

Staff During the Financial Year 2020/21

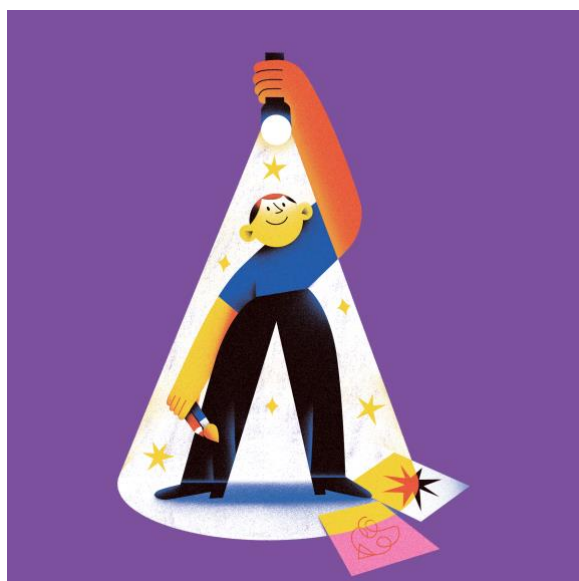
Ren Renwick, CEO (to January 2022)
Rachel Hill, Membership Director
Rasheed Musa, Finance Director
Derek Brazell, Projects Manager
Sabine Reimer, Awards Manager
Daisy McMullan, Awards Coordinator
Georgia Luckman, Membership Adviser (to January 2021)
Sam Walker, Membership Adviser (joined March 2021)
Marianna Madriz, Communications Coordinator
Tania Duarte (joined January 2021)

We work with several freelancers, in particular:

Simon Davies, Finance
HC Gordon, Directories
Natasha Knight, Membership
Fig Taylor, Portfolios
Charli Vince, College Talks
Dave Bain, Events

And with thanks to our Volunteers leading meet-ups through the UK:

Melanie Smith, Matt Joice, Rachel Stubbs, Emily Haworth-Booth, Alexandra Ramirez, Tita Berredo, Vicky Hughes, Nina Hacker, Lana Lê, Maisy Summer, Sarah Wilson, Charli Vince and Ailish Beadle.



AOI Directors

David Gilbert (Chair)
Darryl Clifton (Deputy Chair)
Silvia Baumgart
Montana Forbes
Deirdre McDermott
Ren Renwick
Dan Woodger
Ciara Phelan (joined May 2021)
Daniel Moorey (joined May 2021)
Jhinuk Sarkar (joined May 2021)