

Careers in film and TV - an introduction



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This leaflet provides an overview of the range of jobs within the film and TV industries, most of which require technical and/or creative knowledge and expertise, as well as enthusiasm and dedication. There are generally more opportunities within TV companies than within the film industry.

Film and TV careers appeal to many people. Whether you are excited at the thought of working on a blockbuster, developing state-of-the-art visual effects, creating costumes for a period saga or producing live TV, there are opportunities for people with many different types of skills.

About the industries

The TV industry is made up of the main broadcasters, such as the BBC and ITV, cable and satellite broadcasters, streaming services, independent production companies and a number of community TV companies. In both the film and TV industries, there are a few big organisations and a large number of small companies employing just a few people.

According to statistics from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, in 2022 around 280,000 people in the UK were working in film, TV, video, radio and photography. The British Film Institute (BFI) estimates that in 2021 the UK film industry employed around 106,000 people, with 85,000 working in film and video production roles. The industry is growing and a number of new film and TV studios are under construction in the UK.

The *ScreenSkills Assessment 2021* report outlines the skills that are in demand in film and TV and identifies a number of hard-to-fill roles; these include production managers, line producers, first assistant directors, locations staff and film/unscripted TV editors, as well as certain roles in visual effects and animation.

Getting started

Qualifications and training

Find out what **qualifications** are required for the job roles that interest you. There is a wide range of courses at different levels. In higher education, for example, there are relevant foundation degree, HND and degree courses. Foundation degrees and HNDs are work-related qualifications that take two years, full time, or longer part time. They can usually be topped up to a full degree with further study. It is important to investigate courses carefully - check their reputation/links with employers, the facilities available and the destinations of past students. Sometimes the right aptitude, experience and skills are more important than having formal qualifications.

Apprenticeships can provide a training route into certain job roles in film and TV. As short-term contracts are the norm, you may be able to take a **Flexi-Job Apprenticeship**. You would be recruited and employed by an agency (e.g. the BBC or ScreenSkills) but undertake placements with different organisations in order to build up your skills and experience.

As the technology is constantly being updated, people working in technical roles have to continue training and developing their skills throughout their careers. Providers such as

the National Film and Television School (NFTS) - www.nfts.co.uk/courses - offer a range of specialist courses. National College Creative Industries Ltd (NCCIL) - www.creativeindustries.ac.uk - a joint venture with South Essex College - provides specialist technical production training for backstage careers.

Making yourself employable

The popularity of film and TV work means that competition for work is fierce. Put yourself in the best position by getting the right advice, gaining as much **relevant experience** as possible and undertaking appropriate training. Take any opportunity you can - paid or unpaid - to gain experience and develop your contacts. At college or university, get involved in student or community TV or films. Put together a **portfolio or showreel** of your work so that you have something to show potential employers or training providers. Film and TV clubs - such as those run by the National Saturday Club, see: <https://saturday-club.org/subject/film-media> - can be a useful way to gain experience and meet fellow enthusiasts. Creating your own short films or vlogs can be a way of promoting yourself and your ability to produce video content.

Try contacting employers directly to find out about any **vacancies, work experience** opportunities, **training schemes** etc. The websites of major TV employers are listed under Further Information. You can also search for film and TV companies through *The Knowledge* - www.theknowledgeonline.com - an online directory of film and TV companies and services.

ScreenSkills (see under Further Information) operates **Trainee Finder** for those keen to get experience in film and TV. For details, refer to the leaflet on ***Working in the media*** and see: www.screenskills.com/education-training/trainee-finder.

Creative Access - www.creativeaccess.org.uk - is a scheme that provides paid internships in the creative industries (including film and TV) for talented young people from certain under-represented communities.

For those interested in working in TV, **The Network** is a scheme that gives selected people aged 18+ the opportunity to attend three days of workshops, masterclasses and digital sessions alongside the Edinburgh TV Festival, which takes place in August each year. Participants also receive a year's mentoring. To find out more, view: www.thetvfestival.com/talent-schemes/the-network.

Money matters

Pay varies considerably from one company to another and depending on the actual role. Job adverts can give you an idea of salaries. BECTU - the media and entertainment union - publishes recommended minimum pay rates for freelance workers in various occupations in film and TV - see: <https://bectu.org.uk/get-involved/ratecards>.

Freelancers need the ability to manage their own work contracts and finances, and market their skills to prospective employers. They also have to take responsibility for finding work, and arranging and funding their own training, which can be expensive.

Certain training providers (including the NFTS and NCCIL) offer bursaries, scholarships and other financial support, but check the eligibility criteria.

In some circumstances, ScreenSkills can offer bursaries to help people overcome obstacles to getting started or developing their career. This funding is usually aimed at freelancers from

under-represented groups. You can find out more at: www.screenskills.com/developing-your-career/bursary-guidelines.

The Royal Television Society helps students from lower income backgrounds to pursue a career in TV, by offering technology or production bursaries and other support, e.g. mentoring and networking events. You can find details through: <https://rts.org.uk/education-and-training-pages/bursaries>.

What it takes

The exact skills required depend on your role in film or TV; you often need:

- enthusiasm, commitment and a persistent approach
- creative imagination, and a well-developed sense of colour, shape and composition
- technical ability
- to be willing to work long hours when needed and stay away from home for periods of time
- teamworking skills
- an awareness of the importance of health and safety
- decision-making skills
- to be able to drive
- languages skills (useful for areas such as film sales).

Production work

Some of the main areas of work are listed below; for more details on these and other roles, and their entry routes, see the leaflet on *Production work in film and TV*.

- **Producers** oversee the whole production and have to ensure that the end result is profitable; they are involved with choosing scripts, hiring crew and managing finances. They may be supported by line producers (who deal with costs etc), associate producers and production assistants.
- **Directors** decide on the creative style of a production and direct rehearsals and performances. They may be supported by assistant directors or floor managers.
- **Casting directors** are responsible for getting the right actors. They liaise with the director and producer to find out exactly what the role requires, arrange auditions and negotiate contracts.
- **Locations managers** find suitable places to film, agree terms, access and fees, and sort out security, permits etc.
- **Researchers** are mainly employed in TV. They may be involved in checking facts, finding guests, briefing presenters, and researching storylines and issues. They may also develop programme ideas.
- **Runners** carry out a range of tasks for the cast and crew at different stages of a production. Many people in film and TV start their careers as runners.

Technical work

There is a wide range of technical jobs in film and TV. The main areas of work are outlined here - for more information on these and other roles, and the training involved, refer to *Technical work in film and TV*.

- **The camera crew** - made up of camera operators and camera assistants - captures what is happening on film. They may work out which shots to take or be given a list of shots required.

- **The sound crew** - ensures that the dialogue is recorded clearly. Sound technicians are involved in both production and post-production work. Boom operators position microphones. Sounds must be mixed to combine all the different recordings to produce the final soundtrack. Sound assistants help to set up equipment and check that it is working correctly, while sound recordists monitor the quality of the sound as it's recorded.
- **The lighting department** - the lighting designer/director and lighting technicians use lighting to create different moods, atmospheres and effects.
- **Vision mixers** - after TV filming, put together shots from each camera, to create a sequence. They also work on live shows.
- **Editors** - work with directors to create a watchable film or programme. They cut together scenes (that may have been filmed out of sequence), add visual effects, and may add music, graphics etc.
- **Engineers and technical operators/technicians** - maintain, monitor and modify all of the electronic equipment used for sound, lighting, recording and transmitting footage.

Costumes, sets, hair, make-up and props

A **costume designer** decides what the performers will wear, organises for outfits to be available and may need to know about historical dress. The **wardrobe supervisor** is responsible for the costumes; they organise fittings and alterations, label and store the costumes correctly and arrange for equipment, such as sewing machines and irons, to be available. **Wardrobe/costume assistants** are responsible for maintaining clothes (including washing, ironing, alterations and repairs). There are also opportunities for **make-up and hair artists and designers**.

Production/set designers are responsible for creating sets that fit with the look required by the director. Large productions may have construction departments that include **carpenters, plasterers and painters**. Many films have detailed, elaborate sets that require lots of creative vision and many different practical craft skills. **Riggers** also work on the set, constructing scaffolding, pulleys, ropes and winches to support scenery or allow cameras to move about the set. **Stagehands** may be employed to move items of scenery and keep the set tidy.

Properties (props) managers are responsible for all the props on a set. Props need to be hired, bought or specially made and then carefully accounted for on set.

For more information on the above areas of work, refer to the leaflets on *Costumes, sets and props work* and *Make-up artist*.

Presenting

TV presenters act as hosts, introducing programme features, interviewing guests, asking questions on quiz shows, and so on. They may be actors, newsreaders, journalists, celebrities or experts on particular subjects (e.g. cookery or medicine). There are no formal routes into this work and every presenter's experience is slightly different.

Most presenters have experience in interviewing and reporting. Personality and talent as a communicator are key factors, together with confidence and the ability to stay calm under pressure. When necessary, training is given. Presenters are usually employed on fixed-term contracts.

Newsreaders have to work to a carefully prepared and timed script. The amount of involvement they have in the preparation of news bulletins varies. Newsreaders obviously need excellent communication skills, to be able to read clearly, and to keep cool under pressure. There is no

definite way in, but some newsreaders have progressed from journalism or announcing (see below).

Continuity announcers provide the links between different programmes, and usually have to work 'live', with no second chance to get it right. Many have broadcasting experience, or may have had previous jobs where they have used their voices, such as in acting or teaching.

Other opportunities

There are many other roles in film and TV. A few not mentioned above include:

- **scriptwriters/screenwriters** who produce new scripts or adapt existing novels/plays for film or TV
- **script supervisors** who ensure that each scene shot will make sense after editing
- **animators and special/visual effects technicians** are sometimes needed to achieve the creative vision of a director
- **music producers and composers**
- **actors, stunt performers, entertainers, extras** etc.
- **sales, marketing and film distribution staff** - who ensure that the films and programmes are seen by as many people as possible
- **cinema managers and other staff**
- **interactive media production staff** - audiences now have many more ways in which they can watch, listen to, and interact with programmes/films. Those with qualifications or experience in interactive media, digital design etc are needed to develop websites/apps, to make programmes available as webcasts and podcasts, or to include interactive functions such as voting or games.

For more information on these areas of work, see other leaflets in this system - many are listed in the Related Leaflets section.

Apart from working in the film and TV industries themselves, there are job opportunities with **video/DVD production companies**, making promotional videos/DVDs for bands and record companies, education and training films, and corporate films for public relations and marketing purposes.

Further Information

ScreenSkills - the skills body for the screen-based industries, including film and TV. For job profiles and information on entry routes, training, careers events, bursaries, mentoring etc, view:

www.screenskills.com

Discover! Creative Careers - to explore careers in the creative industries, including in film and TV, and to find out about events, work experience etc, view:

<http://discovercreative.careers>

BFI (British Film Institute) - runs the **BFI Film Academy**, which offers opportunities for young people to develop relevant skills and learn about the industry. Courses, events etc are delivered through various providers.

www.bfi.org.uk/bfi-film-academy-opportunities-young-creatives

BBC Academy - website has information on getting into TV and on making TV programmes.
www.bbc.co.uk/academy

British Council Film - for information on the film industry, see:
www.britfilms.com

Into Film - supports education through film. Organises training, film clubs, competitions, events etc:
www.intofilm.org

Guru - you can hear some of the most successful people in film and TV give insights into their experiences, and get advice at:
<http://guru.bafta.org>

TV companies (*see the following websites for vacancies and information on any work experience placements, trainee schemes, Apprenticeships etc*):

- BBC: www.bbc.co.uk/careers
- ITV: www.itvjobs.com/business-areas
- ITN: www.itn.co.uk/careers
- Channel 4: <https://careers.channel4.com/4skills>
- Paramount (operates Channel 5, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon, MTV and other brands): www.paramount.com/careers
- BT TV: www.bt.com/career/careers-at-bt/media-and-tv
- Sky: <https://careers.sky.com/earlycareers>
- Netflix: <https://jobs.netflix.com>
- Amazon

Related Leaflets

BB 01 Construction trades: an overview

D 03 Web and app design

D 04 Work in multimedia and interactive media

G 00 Engineering - areas of work

G 01 Engineering - qualifications and training

GE 06 Sound recording and related work

MA 01 The commercial leisure industry (includes cinemas)

O 06 Marketing: an overview

P 01 Working in the media

PA 01 Animation

PA 05 Special and visual effects work

PA 10 Careers in radio

PA 12 Production work in film and TV

PA 13 Technical work in film and TV

PB 02 Writing for a living (includes scriptwriting/screenwriting)

Q 00 Careers in performance

Q 07 Costumes, sets and props work

RC 04 Hairdressing

RC 05 Make-up artist