

Production work in film and TV



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The film and TV industries are big business, but the jobs mentioned in this leaflet are amongst the most difficult to get. You will be competing with a lot of ambitious, and often highly qualified, people. Many people in the industry are freelancers.

Work on films or TV programmes begins long before any cameras start filming. Production work includes choosing the right storyline or subject, developing a script, finding actors and crew, deciding on a location and getting the right shots. Producing a film or TV programme is a team effort. This leaflet describes the main jobs involved. For an overview of careers in film and TV generally, refer to the leaflet on *Careers in film and TV - an introduction*, and for details on technical roles, see *Technical work in film and TV*.

Employers

Particularly in the film industry, it's common to work on a freelance basis so you would have to find your own opportunities and arrange your own training. The main employers of production staff are:

- the major broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5)
- cable and satellite broadcasters (e.g. Sky and Virgin Media)
- independent film and TV production companies.

Vacancies (and any opportunities for training and work experience) are advertised on employers' websites. You can search for film and TV production companies through online directories, such as *The Knowledge* - www.theknowledgeonline.com; try contacting them directly to enquire about vacancies.

What you need

To work in film or TV production you need:

- plenty of enthusiasm, motivation, dedication and resilience
- creative ability and technical skills
- teamworking skills
- to be organised and able to juggle different tasks
- to be willing to work long hours when necessary.

The jobs

Please bear in mind that, although there are many similarities between the jobs available (and the job titles used) in film and TV, there are also some differences. There are too many roles in production to describe each in detail here, but the following will give you an overview. Actual entry requirements will vary depending on the employer or training provider.

Producers

The **producer** oversees the whole film/programme-making process from a business perspective. Their role includes identifying a script with potential, securing funding from various sources, selecting the right crew to create the film or programme and day-to-day management of the production team. When production has finished, the producer is also involved in marketing.

Producers need to have strong business and leadership skills in order to deal with budgets, negotiate contracts and manage people. They also need to be good at making decisions and solving problems. They must have a thorough knowledge of the production process, health and safety legislation, and codes of practice. Plenty of relevant experience is required.

In the film industry, producers are often supported by staff such as **line producers**, who may be responsible for such things as costing the project and ensuring that it doesn't run over budget, and **associate producers** who take on tasks as delegated.

Another role in film is that of **production assistant**. Assistants offer organisational and administrative support at every stage of a production, from hiring equipment to organising rehearsals. Production assistants need to be very organised with strong ICT skills. Training is generally on the job; many assistants are graduates. Some assistants aim to become producers.

In TV, the role of the **executive producer** varies, but generally they take overall responsibility for quality and make sure programmes meet the requirements of the body commissioning them. In film, the executive producer is primarily concerned with raising funds and promoting the film. **Production managers/co-ordinators** in film and TV are also involved with organisational matters such as scheduling, budgeting and running the production office on a day-to-day basis.

Directors

Film directors decide the creative style of a film and make the practical decisions that turn their vision into reality (choosing cast, crew and locations, directing rehearsals and actual performances, managing the sound, lighting and editing departments etc). **TV directors** ensure that productions are as they envisaged, both in terms of technical standards and ensuring the output reflects the concept of the programme. They may work to a brief set by the **series producer**.

Directors have to prepare a shooting schedule, planning out each scene that needs to be shot - noting camera movements, backgrounds, locations and movements of the actors. **First, second and third assistant directors** provide support to the director above them and take responsibility for particular tasks. Directors working on TV productions may be assisted by a **floor manager**. TV directors are often based in a gallery (similar to a control room); floor managers work in the studio and communicate with the director via a headset. It is the floor manager's job to cue performers/presenters, ensure filming is on schedule and generally liaise with all the other floor staff.

Directors need creative talent, leadership ability and good communication skills. To find work as a director you will need lots of experience and knowledge of production techniques. Many gain this experience by starting in a junior production role, and working their way up. Floor managers often get experience by working in stage management in theatres.

Casting directors

It's the job of the casting director to find the right actors for a production. As well as being aware of all the different actors available and what they have to offer, the casting director also has to be able to imagine how the actor might play the role. They must take into account the reputation, experience and ability required for the role. It is the casting director's job to audition actors and negotiate their contracts and fees. Casting directors need to be good at

dealing with people. Experience of working with actors is useful for this role. Most casting directors work their way up from **casting assistant** positions in film or TV, or with casting agencies.

Locations managers

Following a brief from the director and producer, the locations manager finds suitable places to film the production - this could be anything from a castle, to a cottage. They must be able to visualise what the director wants. Sustainability concerns are increasingly being factored into location choices. Locations managers need to be organised, as they may have to look at lots of different locations, taking into account issues such as ease of access, security, health and safety and any permits necessary. It's the job of the locations manager to negotiate deals with landowners, liaise with local authorities, and arrange for utilities such as electricity and water, and on-site facilities such as parking and catering. They must also ensure the location is returned to the owner in its original state. Depending on the scale of the project, locations managers may be assisted by an **assistant locations manager** and **locations assistants**.

Most locations managers have lots of experience in the film/TV industry, perhaps initially gained through an assistant role.

Researchers

Most researchers work on making TV programmes, although some check authenticity and accuracy for films. Depending on the employing organisation or programme, researchers may concentrate on one subject area, such as politics or sport, or research lots of different areas, perhaps for a current affairs programme. Researchers may have to find guests or experts to be interviewed on the show, brief presenters, check facts or research issues for a storyline, consulting with specialists where necessary. They may also be involved in developing ideas for a programme.

Researchers are employed, usually on contract, for a programme or series. While they may be recruited internally, experience in journalism is useful. Getting a first job can be very difficult and graduates are often preferred; they can gain experience working as the junior member of a production team. Trainee posts are rarely advertised, so try approaching producers and directors yourself.

Runners

Runners literally run errands and give practical assistance whenever required. They may help on location or on sets and deal with anything from paperwork, to providing refreshments!

In both the film and TV industries this is a key entry-level job (even for graduates) and, as it's a good way to get started in the business, entry is very competitive. Runners often need to be able to drive.

Training and education

With GCSEs, or equivalent, a first step could be to gain a relevant level 3 qualification - examples are given in the leaflet on ***Working in the media***. These can lead to higher education courses or, possibly, to media-related employment.

Apprenticeships can provide structured training in the workplace. In England, there are level 3 Apprenticeships for screen production assistants, level 4 Apprenticeships for media production co-ordinators and level 7 Degree Apprenticeships for creative industries production managers.

In Wales, the Apprenticeship at level 3 in creative and digital media may be suitable for training in production assistant roles. For details on Apprenticeships, see the ScreenSkills website (given under Further Information), or view:

www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

www.careerswales.gov.wales

Relevant **higher education** courses (e.g. degrees, HNC/Ds and foundation degrees) include those in film and/or TV production, and film making. More general media production programmes may also be relevant. When considering courses, find out how much practical experience is offered, what links each course has with production companies and the destinations of previous students. It's also important to look carefully into the facilities available and if the course contains work experience opportunities. Read the prospectuses of institutions carefully because many 'film' courses focus on the theory of film and film critique, rather than practical techniques.

ScreenSkills operates a course endorsement scheme known as **ScreenSkills Select**. A number of further education, undergraduate and postgraduate courses relating to film and TV production have been endorsed. You can search for these at: www.screenskills.com/education-training/screenskills-select.

For entry to a degree programme you need A levels, or an equivalent qualification. All institutions look for evidence of applicants' enthusiasm and motivation; work experience and a portfolio/showreel of your work are very useful, and may be essential in some cases. **Course entry requirements vary, so check carefully with individual institutions and through www.ucas.com.**

There are **postgraduate courses** in areas such as film and TV production, film making and directing. A relevant first degree or industry experience may be required for entry.

Getting started

Having a relevant qualification does not guarantee you a route into the industry. Suitable experience and skills, along with lots of enthusiasm, may be just as important. Many people start at the bottom and work their way up as their abilities are recognised. In fact, this is often the main way in - even for graduates.

Trainee posts, Apprenticeships and work placements are ways of getting experience and learning more about the industry. However, such opportunities are limited in availability and entry is extremely competitive. There's usually no guarantee of a job afterwards, but trainees should be in a stronger position to compete for contracts. A few examples of training/experience programmes are listed below and you can find more general media schemes in the leaflet on *[Working in the media](#)*. If you're looking for work experience you could also try contacting independent production companies.

The **BBC** provides a number of opportunities, including work experience, various Apprenticeships (as outlined under 'Training and education') and the Production Advanced Trainee Scheme - an 18-month paid placement with training. For details on eligibility criteria, availability, deadlines for application etc, and any other suitable schemes run by the BBC, see: www.bbc.co.uk/careers/trainee-schemes-and-apprenticeships/production.

ITV also offers Apprenticeships, runs work experience programmes for those aged 18+, and is

involved in various industry mentoring programmes. Find out more at: <https://careers.itv.com/teams/early-careers>.

Although **Channel 4** commissions almost all of its programmes from independent production companies, it does run a variety of initiatives including work experience for those aged 16+, the 12-month Production Training Scheme (aimed at graduates or those with limited experience), Apprenticeships and various events. For details, see: <https://careers.channel4.com/4skills>.

Other TV companies may also offer work experience placements and training opportunities from time to time.

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

For other organisations that have information on careers, training, placements schemes etc, and for a list of TV company websites where you will find vacancies, work experience opportunities, trainee schemes and Apprenticeships, see the leaflet on *Careers in film and TV - an introduction*.

Related Leaflets

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PA 13 Technical work in film and TV
PB 05 Journalism - areas of work
Q 06 Careers in theatre

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