

Film & TV – Skills Shortage

It will come as no surprise to anyone working within the TV and Film industries that they are currently suffering from a very real skills shortage.

The UK production industry is booming, aided by the streaming wars, leading to platforms such as Netflix, Apple and Amazon filming more and more big and small screen content within the UK. Currently however, the UK workforce is not large enough to meet the increased demand for crew and creative talent. ScreenSkills, an industry led body funded to provide training in these industries, estimates thirty thousand new roles are required to fill the gap. PACT, the independent producer's trade association, is also currently carrying out a survey of the skills shortage amongst its members, the results of which will make for interesting reading.

A recent survey conducted by ScreenSkills highlighted that currently, the main area of deficit relates to the middle tranche of crew, for example production management. 46% of the surveyed ScreenSkills employers detailed that they had moderate difficulty hiring crew, whilst 36% viewed recruiting crew as a serious or very serious issue. It is understandable therefore, why producers are faced with having to action short term solutions to try to supply the demand, with some plugging the gap by promoting existing members of the workforce to roles they have not previously performed at the requisite level; the concern being that a lack of experience could result in diminished standards and increased pressure and anxiety for the individuals in question.

The survey showed that it was mainly skills such as awareness of Covid-19 safety issues and organisation, along with other essential soft skills that were lacking from the current workforce.

In the wake of Covid-19, skills training has perhaps inevitably fallen down the priority expenditure list, with only four hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds being spent on training in the last year, compared to just over one million pounds in the year 2019 to 2020.

So what effect is this having on film and TV productions?

Crew shortages mean that the costs of production are being driven up higher and higher, with unverified reports suggesting some workers are asking for nearly 40% more than was budgeted for their role. Other productions have had to extend their production schedules, due to shutdowns or delays, as they cannot fill the roles to the required level, which also has major cost implications.

When the demand for competent crew is so fierce, training and upskilling remains essential, and the big players in the industry are at the forefront of tackling the issue. It is clear that this is not just about providing numbers of crew; those crew need to be supported and trained to be effective.

Netflix has set up Grow Creative UK to train 1,000 people this year with emphasis on participants from diverse backgrounds. It is providing opportunities to work on hit shows with the job security of 12 month contracts, alongside donations to the London Screen Academy in order to encourage a younger pool of talent.

Amazon has launched a £10 million training initiative in the UK to widen the access to the film and TV industry, with graduates being supported by Prime Video and production heads upon graduation, to enter the industry professionally.

The BFC's partnership with the Production Guild of Great Britain is also aiming to increase access to experienced and diverse crew, offering training in many production roles. Most notably an accredited programme for Covid Supervisors, tackling a big concern for those producers keen to address a potential lack of awareness of Covid-19 safety issues.



Although the skills shortage is a concerning period for the UK production industry, long term benefits will ensue.

Providing all of this funding, training courses and on-the-job experience will create a bigger pool of skilled individuals that will hopefully be retained by the industry for years to come, and a more diverse workforce as a result. Increased diversity within the workforce has been an aspiration for a long time, and the skills shortage is forcing the industry to look outwards to fill the short-term gap, and in doing so broadening the diversity of the workforce. Opening up the recruitment process has already led, according to ScreenSkills, to 70% of recruits being women, 24% Black, Asian or minority ethnicity, 17% LGBT, 9% disabled, 83% from non-fee-paying schools and three fifths being from outside of London and the South East.

Although for many producers in the short term the skills shortage is a testing time and another costly factor to consider in the context of constrained budgets, the industry is pulling together to tackle this crisis by launching numerous initiatives and increasing investment in the industry. Hopefully the long-term impact will be to widen the pool of skilled individuals working throughout all aspects of the industry and increase opportunities for those only just entering, creating a diverse and skilled set of personnel.