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Unscripted TV production in the UK: 2021 skills review

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The survey was conducted by ScreenSkills' in-house research team.

Employer interviews and this report were jointly undertaken by independent consultants, Hannah Corneck and Lisa Howe.

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Introduction

This report is the result of the first ScreenSkills research looking exclusively at the skills needs of unscripted TV. It is designed to complement and provide an evidence base for the work of the new Unscripted TV Skills Fund, which went live in June 2021. The fund is a truly collaborative industry-led commitment to deliver skills and training and tackle the challenges faced by producers and commissioners alike, by finding and developing a sufficiently large and skilled workforce across the UK to meet their needs.

Producers have said clearly in this survey that action is needed now. Those of us who are involved in the Unscripted TV Skills Fund are committed to precisely that – improving the situation after years of underfunding. The commitment of broadcasters, streamers and production companies to increasing investment and working together in the interests of the unscripted TV industry is fantastic. However, as you will see there is a lot to do.

Every part of the UK is currently reporting skills gaps and shortages. The fund's commitment to investing at least 50% of its income in support of beneficiaries in the nations and regions will go some way to help this. We are also committed to investment targeted at specific geographic skills needs, funds permitting. This is unlikely to replicate the scale of training programmes usually associated with the 'old days' when broadcasters were the training ground for the sector, but we will deliver a strategic approach to training in unscripted TV and work closely with partners across the UK to amplify training valued by industry where it already exists, as well as create new programmes where there are none.

It will come as no surprise that production management roles, editors, series producers, self-shooting PDs and APs as well as development roles were identified as in high demand and short supply. The fund has already responded quickly to industry feedback and invested in several of these areas in its first year. Other gaps and shortages are being tackled with a range of free online courses including in budgeting and scheduling, leadership, giving/receiving feedback, resilience and so on. These are an important component of the fund's offer and will be reviewed and adapted to meet changing demand.

We particularly recognise the importance of supporting those in the 'squeezed middle' – experienced mid-level crew where there are particularly acute skills shortages – and many of the programmes we have commissioned offer training as well as work-based placements which came through very strongly from the research as a key industry demand.

But there are shortages at all career stages. So, there is work to be done to meet immediate demands as well as addressing the longer-term need for more people to join and then stay in unscripted TV and for increased diversity and inclusion. The respondents acknowledge that there are still hurdles to overcome to eliminate regional imbalances and achieve diversity in the workforce across the UK.

The research shows broad backing for greater engagement with schools, colleges and universities to highlight the wide range of job roles in unscripted TV to encourage more new entrants in. There is also recognition of the need to keep adapting to changes in technology, to commissioning trends and to globalisation which will undoubtedly impact the skills we need to keep the sector growing.

The report further highlights some of the cultural changes respondents identified as necessary, including:

- consistency in skills and knowledge across job roles to enable more reliable career progression pathways
- equal access to training for staff and freelancers
- support for parents (e.g. creche facilities or job share)
- exit interviews/post-project feedback as standard.

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Some of these suggestions align with the Coalition for Changes commitment to professionalising the industry. ScreenSkills and many of those involved in the fund are signatories to these commitments.

We hope you will find the report informative, if not entirely unexpected. We are confident that the launch of the Unscripted TV Skills Fund will help move the dial in some of these areas and galvanise collective, cohesive action in support of those working in unscripted TV content production.

To those who took part and gave graciously of their time and experience, thank you. Further thanks to those who are committed to the Unscripted TV Skills Fund, including participating broadcasters and streamers - BBC, Channel 4, Sky, Discovery UK, A+E UK, Channel 5 and Netflix – as well as Pact and the production community including those on our working groups and Council.

Sinead Rocks, chair Unscripted TV Skills Fund Steering Group and Jane Muirhead, chair Unscripted TV Skills Fund Council

Background and aims

ScreenSkills is the industry-led skills body for the UK's screen industries. In 2021, it worked with broadcasters, SVODs and indies to launch the Unscripted TV Skills Fund. Dedicated to training and skills development for people working in unscripted TV genres¹, the fund supersedes two previous funds - ScreenSkills TV Skills Fund and the Indie Training Fund (ITF) - with a single entity. With amplified possibilities, this new approach will address skills gaps and shortages across the UK to build a bigger pool of off-screen crew and talent with a particular focus on the nations and regions.

Investment in training for unscripted TV has been small compared with parts of the screen industries that benefit from tax relief. This fund is intended to redress the imbalance. Its unique model – matching investment from contributing broadcasters, SVODs and production companies – is intended to build a more inclusive workforce and help future-proof the industry. Decisions about how the fund is invested are made by practitioners who understand what is needed to develop talent behind the camera across all unscripted genres.

At its core, the fund supports the industry-wide commitment to professionalising work practices, diversifying the workforce to better represent the UK's population and finding collective solutions to training and career development that champion excellence and open doors to opportunities across the UK.

As part of the commitment to consult with the unscripted TV industry, this report presents industry feedback from research undertaken from late summer through autumn 2021. It will help inform the Unscripted TV Council and working groups on how to best utilise the investment funds in 2022/23. As the first such study commissioned by the fund, its primary aims were to:

- present a contextual snapshot of the current and perceived future landscape in which the unscripted TV sector is operating
- identify the most important skills shortages, gaps and related workforce issues in the sector
- enable the fund's key decision makers and administrators to form and deliver a strategic approach to investment.

The research focused on the production process and therefore does not extend into post-production, except to highlight relevant areas of related concern or impact.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, consisting of an online survey followed by in-depth interviews.

Industry survey

Conducted by ScreenSkills' research team, the online survey targeted production companies and staff/freelancers across the UK involved in hiring people and making programmes across a range of unscripted TV genres. Fieldwork took place between July and October 2021 and garnered 114 respondents. Participants were asked up to 14 questions regarding skills shortages and gaps, roles that they perceive as critical over the coming 12 months, and barriers to increasing diversity in the nation or region they mainly operate in.

Using respondents' main location, those based in London made up 44% of the sample, with the other English regions combined at 33%, 15% of respondents were based in Scotland and 4% each in Northern Ireland and Wales. Focusing on the genre in which the respondent's company predominantly work, the majority represented general factual (35%), closely followed by factual

¹ Excludes programmes with a budget of £1 million+ an hour which are eligible for the high-end TV tax credit, and programmes for younger audiences which attract the children's TV tax credit.

entertainment (32%). Specialist factual made up 18% and entertainment 11%. The remainder comprised those working mainly in sport, current affairs, education, or arts and classical music. See Appendix A for the full survey sample breakdown by nation/region, genre and annual turnover.

Employer interviews

In addition to the survey respondents, a further 126 people were invited to take part in qualitative research, resulting in a purposive sample of 32 interviewees. Potential participants were selected with a view to achieving a representative mix of geographic locations, unscripted TV genres and size of company. They were also filtered to ensure that they are responsible for, or have oversight of, hiring within their company. To ensure objectivity and anonymity, interviews were led by independent associates between September and November 2021.

The 45-minute interviews were conducted by phone or Zoom and covered the same key topics as the survey – skills shortages and gaps, perceived critical roles and barriers to increasing diversity – in greater depth. Additionally, participants were asked about their approach and attitude to hiring and training people, and likely significant changes that may affect unscripted TV production in the coming 12 to 18 months.

Within the responding sample, all UK nations and regions are represented except for the East of England. Just over half have their main base outside of London. Nearly two thirds work predominantly in general or specialist factual and just under a third in factual entertainment. The remainder includes those that work mostly in reality, education or sport.

Analysis

Findings, priorities and recommendations in this report are drawn from analysing the quantitative (ie survey) and the qualitative (ie interview) data. It is worth reiterating that, in both instances, it was necessary to use respondents' primary location and genre specialism to arrive at meaningfully conclusive observations. However, it should be remembered that some respondents work within companies that cover multiple UK locations and/or genres - this includes religion and ethics which is not otherwise identified in the sample breakdowns. Where possible, we have used narrative feedback and anecdotal evidence from the interviews to highlight instances where such factors may have influenced findings.

The nature and size of the samples mean that more granular analysis of the data would not provide meaningful results. For example, breaking down the much lower number of respondents in - sometimes secondary - genres such as arts and classical music, education or sport by region would not give reliable insight with which to broadly represent the genre.

It is also worth noting that, unlike the interviews, the survey did not offer participants the option to select 'reality' as a distinct genre. Again, we have used interview responses to highlight any distinct patterns or differences perceived among those working mainly in reality TV.

Context

Without exception, all the UK's unscripted production hubs are experiencing challenges recruiting and retaining staff with the right skills and experience across all genres and roles. There is little difference between nations and regions or unscripted genres. The situation is exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19, creating a 'perfect storm' of increased illness/absence and people leaving the industry, coupled with a significant increase in production over the last 18 months. However, it is broadly acknowledged that the recruitment and skills challenges faced by employers right now have been in the pipeline for many years and the Covid-19 pandemic has simply brought many underlying issues to the surface.

Shortages

Shortages abound, particularly among production management and senior editorial roles. A consistent industry-wide theme across non-Covid related shortages is an apparent fundamental misunderstanding at entry level of the qualities, skills and aptitude required to work in the unscripted sector. In addition, there is a lack of appreciation of the range of opportunities available, even among those in their early career. This is further compounded by a progressively streamlined approach to production in which roles and responsibilities have become increasingly narrow. This is making some jobs - production management, in particular - less attractive, while limiting opportunities to gain the necessary experience required to develop within editorial roles. Practices such as over-promotion, rate inflation and senior staff stepping in to complete junior responsibilities are manifest. The shortage of experienced staff able to respond to rapidly increasing production demands continues to be a significant issue and, at worst, is resulting in productions being delayed to wait for appropriately experienced people.

Gaps

Skills gaps being reported are two-fold: specific production and editorial skills, including leadership, communication and behavioural skills, and cultural and commercial awareness of production, editorial and business processes. It was consistently reflected that there is a need for better understanding of, and sharing between, roles and responsibilities across the editorial-production divide. A big gap in experience and insight at all levels was a commonly cited concern. This affects the context in which the industry works and is becoming increasingly relevant as SVODs' influence on unscripted TV grows. An appreciation of the commercial landscape, including the skills required to produce and deliver unscripted output for SVODs, is rapidly becoming critical for many indies. The absence of an industry-wide unscripted training strategy, often coupled with rapid career progression on a narrow pathway, is thought to have resulted in significant gaps in core skills, from writing and storytelling to budget management and scheduling, as well as leadership and communication. This gap highlights the sector's unmet challenge to stay one step ahead of workforce development needs at a time of significant change and growth.

Hiring

Currently, recruitment in the unscripted sector is largely achieved through use of general and specialist social media groups, most significantly Facebook and Instagram. Word-of-mouth, reputational hiring and commissioners requesting named production talent to green-light productions remain common, while recruitment via development organisations (such as MAMA Youth) offers additional resource for entry-level posts. While social media have been a gamechanger in reaching freelance production talent, the casual nature of this form of promotion when not coupled with a job description or wider advertising, still presents barriers to broadening the scope of applications. Similarly, the challenges presented by commissioners' insistence on 'named' hires ultimately undermines the development of local – often out-of-London – talent.

Inclusion

The study highlighted a widely acknowledged need and aspiration to be more inclusive when recruiting unscripted production talent. Equally, it was largely reported that the expectation to 'do better' presented significant talent pipeline issues that are difficult to solve without tackling a key root cause: the industry is not set up to employ people who are under-resourced. This is not just about an individual's financial status but also their confidence, and academic and social background. Short-term contracts, low pay and volatile, unpredictable working conditions do not equate to job stability. A lack of relevant role models and a perception that entry to the industry is difficult to navigate, or simply 'something other people do', prevail. Appetite for increased, consistent promotion of the sector as a career option through all stages of education is strong, along with desire to see more people from under-represented groups in high profile and leadership

roles. However, it was accompanied by a sense of frustration that work is needed across the value chain to widen the understanding and appreciation of what success in diversity means UK-wide, focusing less on 'visible diversity' to achieve the fullest accessibility.

Training

There is a perception that the training landscape serving unscripted TV is fragmented, with comparatively few easily identified and trusted training providers. Since the creation of BBC Studios in 2017, the reliance on the BBC to 'train the industry' (eg via BBC Academy courses and formal in-work development and progression), has been diminished. In its absence, and alongside the closure of the ITF, there is a perceived lack of trusted 'one front door' training provision for the sector. Structured schemes that combine on-the-job experience with formal training now appear to be most recognised and appreciated in providing targeted career development that has a lasting effect. For example, the quality and impact of ScreenSkills' Series Producer Programme was commonly cited. But with extensive gaps in skills and experience highlighted across roles and genres – through Covid-19, market growth and the increasing influence of the streamers – the need for more training is at the fore, underpinned by growing recognition of its essential strategic role in securing the sector's ability to deliver top-quality output.

Future

Respondents' views of the coming 18 to 24 months were varied and often uncertain. This is probably due to ongoing unprecedented demand for content amidst an increasingly complex operating landscape. While market optimism was shown, greater emphasis was placed on challenges and barriers than opportunities when considering what the most significant changes will be over this period. A greater focus on diversity and regionality is perceived, along with the impact of technology – particularly remote working, workflow and post – and the rise of SVOD commissioning. But these are countered with concern that lack of workforce and skills, increasing pressure on budgets and schedules and regional imbalances (some demonstrated, others perceived) could prevent the unscripted TV sector's full realisation of its potential at this unique moment in time.

Key findings

Skills shortages

Survey respondents and interviewees were asked about the roles they had experienced difficulties filling over the past year, ie skills shortages.

Hardest to recruit roles

The survey presented a list of common roles against which respondents were asked to rank their hiring experience from 'very difficult' to 'very easy', allowing an option to enter any additional roles that were not listed (see table 1).

Table 1 Survey respondents: “How did you find recruiting/crewing-up for the following job roles over the past 12 months?”

	Very difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Very easy
Production coordinator	73%	18%	5%	3%	1%
Production manager	70%	23%	3%	4%	1%
Editor	42%	37%	13%	7%	0%
Series producer	33%	37%	25%	5%	0%
Development producer	25%	35%	31%	8%	1%
Exec producer	21%	40%	33%	3%	3%
Development AP	19%	23%	34%	23%	1%
Self-shooting PD	14%	45%	27%	14%	1%
Edit producer	11%	46%	22%	19%	2%
Self-shooting AP	8%	37%	34%	20%	1%
Researcher	3%	33%	29%	30%	5%

Base: All (n=114)

See Appendix A for full survey responses, including regional breakdowns and additional, less frequently mentioned, shortages.

There are few significant differences when considering the survey data from a regional perspective. The difficulty of recruiting in Wales appears notably higher across the majority of these 11 roles than elsewhere in the UK. Conversely, respondents in London – and to some extent the South East of England – generally reported lower levels of recruiting issues than other UK nations and regions. This may reflect the increasing busyness outside of London, impacting the historically smaller workforces in the nations and regions. An apparent comparative ease of recruiting executive producers in the North of England is suggested by the regional breakdown, which seems unusual. It may be an anomaly due to the make-up of the sample and was not reflected in the qualitative responses.

While interviewees were asked an open question – “Which roles in the production process do you always or often have difficulty recruiting for locally?” – the combined hardest-to-recruit roles closely mirror those of the survey sample. However, no clear differences or patterns emerged relating to genre or geography among those questioned – the same shortages appear across the board.

Disparities

Interviewees were also asked whether they had noticed disparity in the local workforce in terms of level, for example, plenty of production managers but too few production secretaries. The majority – nearly half – felt that there was no disparity, stating that shortages were apparent at every level.

Regardless of their response, many noted that at all levels they found hiring suitably experienced people difficult, ie the job title and associated level of experience were increasingly out of alignment, with many people having stepped up 'too soon' and/or after only experiencing limited aspects of a role. In other words, wide-ranging and unpredictable experience or 'generation' gaps, as opposed to shortages of people or specific skills gaps, made hiring more difficult.

"Disparity comes from grade inflation, people calling themselves producers when they are in fact an AP. It also comes from diversification of roles and absence of wider editorial experience as people rise through the ranks in areas like casting."

- West Midlands, factual

"People no longer grow up learning all the roles. Experience is compartmentalised - edit producers, casting producers, field producers - so they don't have well-rounded experience."

- London, factual entertainment

"People need to experience the whole process many times over to be ready to move up. No amount of training can counter that."

- North West, education

Again, no notable variances between genre or nation/region were evident.

Reasons for shortages

Interviewees were also asked why they felt skills shortages were so prevalent in their local area. A significantly high proportion of reasons were given related to commercial circumstances, rather than associated skills and training or work culture. Most commonly, interviewees cited recent historical under-investment in production roles (as opposed to editorial), including lack of parity in pay and recognition, as a key driver. A general increase in commissions, including more higher budget shows, along with more frequent poaching of people, high levels of burnout (especially in production management roles) and lack of retention were the next most common reasons.

"This is about overloading people with a volume of work that is unsustainable."

- London, specialist factual

"There's a lot of poaching going on, with people leaving mid-contract for higher rates or a longer running show."

- South West, specialist factual

"After the Covid hiatus, the reality genre exploded and the commissions are massive. They suck up crew like a black hole".

- London, factual entertainment

"Lots of production managers are leaving the industry, particularly after having children. There's no work/life balance."

- Scotland, factual

"There's an issue here with people moving over to the big dramas. It doesn't matter what genre a production coordinator is from, they'll take them."

- Wales, factual entertainment

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The most suggested reasons relating specifically to skills and training were given as:

- lack of awareness among entrants of the breadth of available roles, especially in production, archive and post
- too few entrants seeking production management roles
- university degrees not covering the right skills.

Addressing these inter-related points would help yield mid- to long-term results for the sector and do little to serve immediate short-term demand. However, they are nonetheless essential points of action to prioritise – alongside addressing the increasing commercial pressures on and negative perceptions of production roles – in building a sustainable and well-informed workforce.

"Production isn't seen as 'sexy'. Entrants come in and those that do often chase editorial roles to move up with. There's been little succession planning for years now."

- London, factual

Overall, there were no significant differences across genres. From a regional perspective, several interviewees based outside of London felt that commercial and cultural factors often combine to lock local freelancers out of opportunities, thereby not developing skills and experience in the indigenous talent pool. This was reported as affecting all roles and levels, but particularly those in mid-tier to senior positions who are deemed most likely to leave the area to seek better prospects elsewhere.

"There's a self-fulfilling prophecy about development. Everyone says there's no development talent outside of London, so development is then centralised and no one invests in the nations and regions."

- North West, factual entertainment

"We struggle to retain senior freelance people across the board as they tend to gravitate to staff roles or go elsewhere in the UK to develop."

- Northern Ireland, factual

"Commissions are so hard won, indies would rather buy the talent in from outside the area than take time – and risk – on developing local talent."

- Scotland, factual

"Being in a region, we really struggle to recruit. Being close to London means there is a talent drain to the capital."

- South East, factual entertainment

It is also worth briefly reflecting on the impact that shortages in unscripted TV production may be having on post-production. A small number of post-production employers were included in the interview sample, all highlighting some recruitment difficulty with staff roles such as client services and machine room operations. While some natural loss regularly occurs as people in these roles move into production, the current boom – in scripted, as well as unscripted content – appears to be exacerbating the issues. Productions are proactively poaching to fill shortages and gaps, leaving some post facilities struggling to retain experienced people.

"It's hitting the senior levels badly and leaves us with more juniors. They [seniors] are attractive to production companies; they have understanding and insight that many production people don't have."

- London, post-production

"We think creatively when hiring and look to other parts of the industry. We've recruited from a post-production house and transferred them across into production."

- London, factual entertainment

The potential extent of this 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' scenario is not a sustainable solution: it moves the problem to another part of the value chain, creating challenges that may not be widely understood or visible until too late.

Coping with shortages

To explore the resulting consequences of skills shortages within the unscripted TV production workforce, interviewees were asked "How do you cope with shortages in the local workforce?". Five almost equally common responses were given:

- look to other nations or regions to hire
- develop people in-house, ie planned response
- share extra responsibilities among experienced team members
- step people up early or take a risk on less experienced person, ie unplanned response
- offer roles remotely where viable.

Several of these ways of coping are likely to be perpetuating concerns such as burnout, lack of retention and experience gaps – all considered to be reasons for the shortages. Few responses mentioned sending people on, or commissioning training courses, most probably due to pressures on time and budget to do so. No clear differences showed between genres or, perhaps most significantly, geography: regardless of where interviewees were located, everybody was looking everywhere for the people they needed.

"Even for our Manchester office, we hired from other places and used remote working where feasible - London, Scotland, Cornwall."

- London, reality

"We cast the net wider and look to the North of England, then London."

Sometimes we need to delay production if right people cannot be found."

- Scotland, factual

While many interviewees mentioned making use of remote working to help address shortages, (and it gained further mentions when looking at the future of work, as discussed later in this report), it was also viewed with caution, especially by some outside of London who felt it could be a double-edged sword, citing mainly commercial concerns.

"'Bums on seats' demonstrated that you were a proper nations and regions company, but with remote working it's hard to demonstrate"

- Scotland, factual

"We farm work out to remote freelancers but try not to as there is a struggle with ethos and QC. No ownership means lack of investment in output."

- South East, factual entertainment

Actions required to tackle shortages

To help identify potential solutions to the evident skills shortages, interviewees were asked "What single thing would most help to improve crew and staff shortages where your company is based?". Some commercial and cultural suggestions were commonly offered, such as increasing budgets and schedules to help retention (ie better work/life balance, recognition of increasing workloads), more commissions in local hubs to give regular workflow and develop the talent pool, and changing

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attitudes to production roles and professional development. However, the majority of responses related to entry-level skills and training:

- raise awareness of job roles and career pathways to entrants from an early stage, ie in schools, colleges and universities
- include practical, relevant work insight and experience for students on unscripted TV-related courses
- make a collaborative industry-wide effort to offer 'gold-standard' work-based entry-level training routes
- offer progressive industry-standard graded short courses at all levels, ie the 101, 201, 301 model.

It was acknowledged that the above solutions are long-term and therefore unlikely to yield immediate impact. There was no notable difference in responses by genre or geography.

"We need education about opportunities to work in screen from primary school age up and to make university courses fit-for-purpose."

- South West, factual

"Work-based learning gets people up to speed far more quickly than training courses. Having formal training helps, but it doesn't solve it all."

- Wales, factual entertainment

"At the end of three months in the office, people know a lot more and have gained experience."

- Northern Ireland, factual

"The fragmented training landscape needs pulling together to offer benchmarked training through one front door that can work at scale."

- London, factual

Skills gaps

The research also explored skills gaps in unscripted TV production, ie skills that need improving within the existing workforce.

Most common gaps

Survey respondents were directed to a list of skills and asked which they would like to see improved among the people they work with (see table 2). An option to add any further gaps was also given.

Table 2 Survey respondents: "Which of the following skills would you like to see improved in the workforce/crew you work with (both staff and freelancers)? Please select the most important."

Skills gap	Total
Financial and budgetary skills	52%
Scheduling	46%
Project management skills	46%
Ability to set and communicate clear goals and instructions	44%
Ability to deliver/receive feedback	42%
Teamworking skills	37%

Delegation skills	36%
Ability to organise work (time management skills, prioritising tasks, setting timelines)	34%
Ability to manage and support teams/crew remotely and in person	32%
Ability to develop or support new/emerging talent	31%
Mentoring	30%
Interpersonal skills (e.g. empathy, mental health support)	27%
Resilience (e.g. perseverance, flexibility in solving problems)	26%
Ability to address unconscious bias	23%
HR skills	18%
Ability to onboard new starters remotely	18%
General health and safety skills	14%
Covid safety measures skills	13%
Respect at work (e.g., how recognise/address bullying and harassment, create a safe environment)	12%
Other	10%

Total respondents = 114.

See Appendix A for full survey responses, including the additional less frequently noted skills gaps.

When viewing the data from a nations and regions perspective, survey results from Scotland most closely map the overall figures in table 2. Respondents in the North and South West of England generally indicated less severity of skills gaps, while Wales, South East England and London respectively reported higher instances overall. Northern Ireland and, to a much lesser degree, the Midlands/East of England vary most from the average pattern. Most notably, Northern Ireland shows much greater skills gaps in areas of finance and budgeting, scheduling, project management, the ability to manage teams, give instructions or delegate, communication and interpersonal skills, but significantly lower gaps in areas such as HR, mentoring, addressing unconscious bias, giving/receiving feedback and general health and safety. This may reflect the progression pathways available for people to develop locally, e.g. fewer senior and leadership roles. Similarly, finance and budgeting, scheduling, project management, mentoring and Covid management skills, along with the ability to onboard remotely, were particularly lacking in the Midlands/East of England compared to the region's other gaps and the overall average.

Interviewees were instead asked an open question: 'Which skills would you like to see improved in the staff or crew you work with?' This approach also picked up many of the gaps associated with communication, leadership and finance highlighted in the survey. It also yielded a wider range of responses which collectively suggest gaps across a greater breadth of technical, creative and behavioural skills. The most common interview responses may be grouped under six categories:

Table 3 Most commonly cited skill gap areas among interviewees.

Skill category	Role type	Examples
Storytelling	Editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> scripting storytelling on location (self-shooting and crewed shoots) storytelling in the edit (structure, nuance, format beats) commentary

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Leadership	Editorial; production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confidence • identifying and dealing with bullying and harassment • managing people/teams • negotiation skills • resilience • taking responsibility
Communication	Editorial; production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attention to detail • communication when working remotely • general interpersonal skills • managing upwards • note-taking • phone skills (entrants/early career) • rapport and relationship-building
Self-shooting	Editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognising the editorial context and need • setting up the visual environment • technical set-up and operation (camera, sound)
Budgeting and finance	Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • budget management • creating development budgets • forecasting • running cost centre (PMI/Excel/MovieMagic*)
Development ability	Editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating decks • producing sizzles • pitching • understanding distinct broadcaster needs • writing
<p><i>*The inclusion of MovieMagic relates to high-budget reality and streamer-commissioned productions.</i></p>		

While there were no clear geographical patterns among the interview sample in relation to the above skills gaps, there were a few additional genre-specific gaps to note from general and specialist factual interviewees:

- setting up filming (overseas filming, permissions, risk assessments, health and safety, producing call sheets)
- rights and clearances, including for archive
- research skills (asking the right questions, attention to detail, media law, strategic planning, understanding casting needs).

Many responses and supporting points made by interviewees related skills gaps to a general lack of experience and the loss of longer, more varied early career pathways in unscripted TV. Interviewees emphasised an increasingly common lack of understanding of job roles, progression routes and the overall production process among people in entry to mid-career level roles. For example, production staff not understanding the editorial process and vice versa, editorial staff not understanding the edit craft and process, production staff not understanding the process or management of post. This was more generally articulated in several cases as people 'not even understanding the next role in their pathway before they step up'.

*"People are spending less time in one role before they move up than ever before - it's creating lots of gaps in knowledge."
- North West, education*

The lack of ability to drive among new entrants was also widely noted by interviewees as a gap, with affordability cited as a likely cause.

Coping with gaps

To better understand how skills gaps are being dealt with, interviewees were asked “How do you usually address the skills gaps in the local workforce?” The most common approaches across genres and locations, with an equal number of responses, were to support people to learn on the job or to send people on an internal or external training course. Asking other people in the team to cover the gaps was the next most frequent – and possibly least sustainable – answer, followed by asking people to self-teach or signposting them to courses. Mentoring less experienced people was further mentioned by participants working in general factual.

Actions required to tackle gaps

In seeking to understand how skills gaps could be best addressed, interviewees were asked: “What single thing would most help to improve the skills gaps in local crew and staff?” The two most common suggestions, popular across genres and nations/regions, were to offer:

- 'single-door' access, standardised and connected training courses at all levels, ie the 101, 201, 301 model
- step-up schemes for a wider range of grades and levels, ie a structured combination of experience and training (the ScreenSkills-backed Series Producer scheme was given as a frequent example. Others included the broadcaster-led Fast Track to Factual and NI Screen's Aim High).

Setting out agreed professional standards for unscripted TV career pathways, ie the expected skills and experience for each career stage, was the next most common point – and one which directly relates to the top two. All highlight a strong desire for consistency in skills and knowledge across the sector as people enter and progress.

Equally, ranking suggestions were made that relate more to changing industry culture than to specific skills and training solutions. Interviewees from across genres and locations cited the need for a collaborative industry-wide effort to support and develop freelancers, giving examples such as offering on-site creche facilities, giving freelancers and staff equal access to training and providing appraisals and/or post-project feedback to help freelancers better understand their own development needs.

It is worth noting that while the need for learning on-the-job was regularly raised, respondents often cited a current dilemma exacerbated by the extreme shortages: experienced people are usually far too busy to provide the sufficient level of attention and input required to guide others. Therefore, externally supported and/or supervised schemes were seen as providing an extra layer of assurance in bringing people on.

Attitudes and approaches to workforce development

The in-depth interviews also looked at what is currently being done to address workforce training, considering internal and external solutions deployed by companies working in unscripted TV. Responses varied greatly and did not present particularly clear or insightful findings, either by genre, geography or more generally. This may be due to interviewees, who were approached based on their involvement in the hiring process, not having such close links to training practices within the company. A contributing factor may also be the current high volume of production, reducing companies' and individuals' ability to engage with formal training, particularly traditional training courses. However, throughout the interviews, references were often made to the loss of the high-quality training and career development formerly provided by the broadcasters. Perception is that the resulting gap has not yet been filled and leadership is required.

*"No one is owning the problem of the pipeline."
- London, factual entertainment*

In-house training

To build a picture of what companies are doing themselves, interviewees were asked: “Do you offer any in-house training and development?” Initial 'yes' or 'no' responses suggest that just over two thirds of companies represented do train staff, while just under a third do not. When further interrogated, the examples of in-house training given include mandatory or induction/onboarding training (eg health and safety, compliance, bullying and harassment awareness training), and use of externally-facilitated schemes, at entry and step-up levels (eg Factual Fast Track, Aim High, Kickstart, Mediorite).

If such training is discounted (ie it is not internally generated and/or addressing particular skills gaps), the responses to the question are reversed, with just over two-thirds not offering in-house training, while just under a third are. Examples of in-house training were varied and showed no particular pattern across genres or location. They most commonly include internal training courses and briefings, structured on-the-job learning and coaching.

Training providers

Interviewees were also questioned regarding their awareness of local training providers and whether those providers were in tune with industry need, delivering the type and standard of training required.

Nearly two-thirds of interviewees did not know of local training providers. Just over a third had some awareness, though few of those were confident in judging the fit of the training to industry need. Overall, many of the providers named were UK-wide organisations, often based in London or the South East of England though some have dedicated regional offers. Interviewees from Scotland and Wales were most likely to name and comment positively on local training provision. BECTU and NFTS had specific mentions for their locally delivered training in each of those nations, alongside local companies TRC in Scotland and Sgil Cymru in Wales.

Remote training

With an increase in the amount of training available remotely, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic struck, interviewees were specifically asked if they used, or were aware of, providers outside their region that offer remote training. Over half of interviewees said their companies had not engaged with remote training, just under a third thought they had. The remaining interviewees were unsure whether remote training had been taken up.

Among those whose companies had accessed remote training, ScreenSkills' free online masterclass sessions were a commonly cited and well-received example. Unspecified remote health and safety training was also mentioned. While interviewees were largely receptive to the principle of remote training, several noted that having a 'live' instructor was preferable to pre-recorded or self-teach sessions, and ultimately the topics and skills being covered determine what should be the most appropriate delivery method. However, the benefits of accessing remote training – such as reducing the time and cost associated with travel or fitting training alongside work – were often appreciated.

Improving inclusivity

Hiring

Before exploring the findings regarding inclusivity, it is worth considering additional context from the in-depth interviews which looked at hiring patterns. Responses across genres and UK locations highlight that by far the most common approaches across to hiring are:

- posting via social media, particularly industry-specific groups, often with a regional or diverse community bias, eg Black in TV, TV Collective, TV Talent North

Unscripted TV production in the UK - skills review

- seeking returning crew or asking word-of-mouth
- looking and/or advertising on industry specialist websites, eg Production Base, Talent Manager, Unit List.

The next most common approach (half as popular as those above) was via outreach organisations and/or schemes, such as Dandi, MAMA Youth and Triforce Creative Network.

A need for crew consistency, particularly across series (ie the benefits of familiarity on costs, turnaround and quality), combined with increasingly short windows for moving into production were the drivers that necessitate such hiring patterns. The use of social media and organisations that focus on a particular location or demographic suggests a targeted broadening of reach. However, the overall picture reiterates the perception of a reliance on known networks, albeit of varying types - in other words, people have to know in advance about those routes/groups/organisations in order to be considered.

Barriers to recruiting a more diverse workforce

Survey respondents were asked “Which, if any, of the following barriers do you think your organisation faces in recruiting a more diverse workforce?” (see table 4). Lack of applications from under-represented groups was the most common response. It was cited with higher frequency by those outside of London and the South East of England, and most significantly by those in the South West of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland respectively. This may reflect local demographics, but the interview findings suggest it may also indicate varying perception of what 'under-represented' or 'diverse' means. The next most cited barriers were a lack of visibility of jobs and lower quality in applications and/or applicants from under-represented groups (particularly notable in Wales, the South West of England and Scotland).

Table 4 Survey respondents: “Which, if any, of the following barriers do you think your organisation faces in recruiting a more diverse workforce? Please select all that apply.”

Barrier	Total
We do not receive many applications from under-represented groups	59%
More could be done to advertise jobs to reach more diverse applications	46%
The quality of applications and applicants from under-represented groups is not at the level we hope to recruit to	42%
Recruitment practice is carried out informally (eg through word of mouth)	25%
Lack of training and understanding for hiring staff and managers	20%
No barriers	7%
Production locations are not accessible	5%
Building or workplace environment is not accessible	4%

Total respondents = 114

Respondents in the Midlands/East of England, London and Scotland were most likely to feel that informal hiring practices contributed to a lack of diversity, while those in London and Scotland were also most likely to consider a lack of visible job opportunities as a barrier. No respondents from the North of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales considered physical accessibility to be a barrier, ie lack of access to workplace buildings or locations.

ScreenSkills

Interviewees were additionally asked: "What single thing could help to change this?" Half of participants felt that more outreach is needed, including targeting children and young people in all stages of education from primary up (eg via a high-profile UK-wide ad campaign), to raise awareness of unscripted TV roles and let people from all backgrounds know that they are welcome.

"Change the perception that TV is impenetrable and encouraging school children to think of it as an accessible career."

- Scotland, factual

"We need a TV campaign like ScreenSkills' film recruitment campaign - to get into schools and promote the industry to young people."

- South West, factual

Other common responses – again across all genres and locations, though significantly fewer than the outreach suggestion – included making changes to working culture (eg more sociable hours, longer contracts, better entry-level pay) to make careers more attractive and viable, and increasing the number of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in leadership roles. Better consideration of national or regional demographics and representation when setting diversity quotas was also often cited. Interviewees felt that applying quotas based on London demographics to other nations and regions may be locking some local people out of opportunities, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds. It is worth noting that interviewees based in London were among those citing a mismatch between diversity quotas and local populations in the context of productions based outside the city.

Recognising and removing barriers to socio-economic inclusion was echoed as a priority across most nations and regions, with several respondents linking the above-mentioned changes to working culture as a means to attract people from less well-off backgrounds.

"More outreach regarding opportunities in the industry. Young people – particularly from lower socio-economic backgrounds - don't think this industry is for them."

- South West, specialist factual

"It's impossible to start a career in TV without money. We need to offer entrants a year-long contract otherwise why would they stay in the industry. It's not a very welcoming experience."

- London, specialist factual

That said, the potential sensitivity surrounding people's social backgrounds was recognised as a deeper barrier. As one interviewee further noted, many people in the industry felt they had been expected to hide their background but are now told to be open about it: "It's really hard when you've covered it up for many years."

Surprisingly, improving accessibility to job roles for people with disabilities was rarely specifically mentioned by interviewees, despite the potential challenges of meeting varying needs of individuals, especially when hiring in a very short timeframe. However, it was alluded to within an overall sense of needing to acknowledge the full breadth of what inclusivity really means.

"Diversity in its broadest sense is still lacking - it's about reaching people and making the jobs accessible to them."

- London, factual

Future trends and challenges

Supplementary questions were included to help understand what unscripted TV production companies are likely to be planning for, or concerned about, in the short to mid-term, and to

identify if and how such changes may influence workforce training and development needs. This considered critical job roles, anticipated changes to the market, working practices or the wider operating landscape, and barriers – particularly locally – that may prevent positive change or exacerbate negative change.

Critical roles

Before considering the findings from the survey or interviews, a caveat should be noted. The interviews suggested that responses often related to immediate need from the single viewpoint of the interviewee's job role. For example, a production manager experiencing a shortage of production coordinators may therefore consider the production coordinator role to be most critical to the business, however, a company owner – ultimately responsible for securing commissions to keep the business afloat – may consider their strongest development or editorial person as most critical. While these angles are both valid, the combined responses have a hidden layer that makes more reliable scrutiny and decisive conclusions difficult. It should be assumed that the same may apply to the survey responses.

Survey respondents were given a list of nine key roles from which to prioritise one that they felt would be most critical in the coming year. An option to give an alternative role was provided.

Table 5 Survey respondents: “Which of these roles is most critical to your business in the next 12 months? Please select one.”

Role	Total
Production manager	40%
Production coordinator	14%
Series producer	12%
Self-shooting PD	8%
Development producer	6%
Executive producer	4%
Editor	4%
Development AP	2%
Researcher	2%
Other (combined)	8%

Total respondents = 114

See Appendix A for full survey responses, including less frequently mentioned critical roles.

Interviewees were asked a similar question, but with an emphasis on strategic criticality, no prompts from a list and ability to offer more than one answer: “Which roles do you think are strategically most critical to your business in the next 12 months?” Despite the different approach, responses largely mirror the survey findings, with one notable exception of self-shooting PD which did not feature significantly in the interview feedback. There were no other significant patterns within or between the quantitative and qualitative data.

The bias toward production managers and coordinators – which appear in the top two places respectively in both samples – probably reflects two things: the immediate shortage of, and urgent

need for, these roles to keep productions moving and the perspective of the person responding to the survey or interview question.

Two further roles were mentioned by interviewees which did not appear in the survey responses: line producer (once) and showrunner (twice). Despite the low number of occurrences, it is worth highlighting these roles as they are relatively new to unscripted TV production in the UK. Like the mention of MovieMagic in the skills gaps data, this is likely to be a sign of changing structures for higher budget shows, particularly those commissioned by SVODs.

Significant changes

Interviewees were also asked: “Over the next 18 months to two years, what are the most significant changes you think will affect unscripted production and its workforce?” Responses were wide-ranging across genres, but largely fell into distinct themes; the most common were:

Table 6 Short to mid-term changes in unscripted TV production most perceived among interviewees.

Theme	Examples, ranked in order with the most common cited first
Increased focus on diversity and regionality (56%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bigger push for a more diverse workforce at all levels • Decentralisation of indies, ie away from London • Increased demand for diverse and regional content and stories • More 'brass-plating' (especially with remote working) to win out-of-London commissions will take opportunities from 'genuinely' local companies and freelancers • A bigger broadcaster presence in the nations and regions • New or increased studio space developed locally
Impact of technology on working practice (53%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible and remote working will improve working conditions • More remote production, workflow and post • Remote/flexible working will be a barrier to on-the-job learning • Remote working will see overseas companies using UK people • Increased demand for high-tech camera competency
Greater presence and related impact of SVODs (40%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More SVOD unscripted commissions • SVOD-commissioned projects will impact workforce, eg bigger teams, more specialist production management skills, varying compliance and deliverables • Increased presence of SVODs will disrupt indigenous production companies and broadcasters, but unsure how
Increased pressure on and from broadcasters (22%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More pressure on budgets and schedules as costs inflate and broadcasters are squeezed, eg long/expensive carnet system post-Brexit, Covid protocols remain, environmental sustainability to cost in, inflated rates to retain talent and crew • Broadcasters will become more risk-averse

Other perceived changes mainly relate to a period of predicted general uncertainty as industry finds ways to keep up with the level of demand. This includes the risk of the existing workforce becoming less prepared to sustain long hours and tight schedules and of training being pushed aside as production teams become too busy to train people.

Barriers to change

To further consider the picture across UK nations and regions, interviewees were asked whether local barriers exist that may adversely affect or exacerbate perceived changes. Again, responses were wide-ranging across genres, but formed distinct themes. However, most of the barriers identified were acknowledged as likely to be UK-wide, rather than present in only certain geographical areas. Of those, the most common were:

Table 7 UK-wide barriers considered by interviewees as inhibitors or exacerbators of change.

Theme	Examples, ranked in order with the most common cited first
Lack of workforce and skills (50%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough people in or entering the workforce • Skillsets getting more specialised as market gets polarised, ie different skills/role definitions depending on production type • High levels of burnout in the workforce • Too many people stepping up early • Skilled people leaving the workforce • Lack of awareness of production roles among entrants • Lack of training to replace former broadcaster-led training
Pressure on budgets and schedules (31%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflated costs, eg cost of living in hub/city, high overheads, long-term property leases, higher pay rates • Too many asks of production teams, but no funding to cover it, eg Covid protocols², Albert³, Diamond⁴ • Tighter broadcaster budgets and schedules • Limited resources/ability to develop people

Also mentioned on a UK-wide level were the need to make practical and cultural adjustments, such as meeting demand for new ways of working (eg flexible, remote), along with improving conditions and valuing people.

The following responses relate to location-specific barriers:

Table 8 Nation and/or region-specific barriers considered by interviewees as inhibitors or exacerbators of change.

Theme	Examples, ranked in order with the most common cited first	Nation or region reporting
Regional imbalance (31%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust from broadcasters in talent from nations and regions, ie unwilling to take 'risk' 	London* Scotland South West England
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of 'real' regional commissioning, ie brass-plating, remote working from outside the region 	Scotland
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to commissioners 	North of England Scotland
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of visibility within the rest of the UK 	Northern Ireland
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not building strong local hubs to compete with London, eg lack of regular workflow, suitable people, studios and facilities, retention 	North of England Scotland
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of suitably skilled people in nations and regions to make shows that move out of London 	London*
Infrastructure and policy (19%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brexit paperwork and restrictions on travel 	London Northern Ireland
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty finding available studio space 	London
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital connectivity 	South West England
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport connectivity to and in the North 	London North of England
Achieving diversity (13%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity quotas don't reflect many out-of-London populations 	Scotland South West England
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial squeezing-out of small/individual producers will hinder diversity of content 	Scotland

*Reported by London-based respondents in relation to nations and regions

² <https://www.pact.co.uk/members-hub/covid-19.html>

³ <https://wearealbert.org>

⁴ <https://creativitydiversitynetwork.com/diamond/>

No clear trends were noticeable in relation to genre.

Anticipated changes and barriers alike could have a significant and complex relationship with future skills and training. For example, the predicted shift in focus to diversity and regionality will require greater development of talent in key hubs. To be credible and meaningful, actions to address this must therefore consider the need to reflect local diversity priorities and alleviate concerns over brass-plating and/or importing talent from elsewhere, including via remote working.

Similarly intricate is the potential impact of increased SVOD presence in unscripted TV, while broadcasters' budgets fall under ever-greater pressure. This prospect of a polarised market – where the higher-budget end requires different production skill sets and commercial understanding in development and editorial – risks worsening rather than resolving the perceived loss or fragmentation of training at a time of critical skills shortages.

Themes and priorities

The following points are intended to highlight key messages from this inaugural research and help identify subsequent actions. Not all relate directly to the training and skills remit covered by the Unscripted TV Skills Fund. However, they are included to illustrate wider commercial and cultural points that may influence – and in some cases already are to varying degrees – workforce development. Considering such conditions may therefore help when prioritising and assigning funds, ie are the proposed solutions the best to develop skills in the current working environment?

Training and skills development

Standardised and industry-benchmarked training

It was universally acknowledged by interviewees that there is an acute absence of basic skills across unscripted roles and genres that risks becoming endemic and perpetual. The need for a central, visible and credible point of access and delivery for industry-standard training was repeatedly referenced. The following factors were cited:

- the absence of formal training, historically provided by the broadcasters, means that the new entrants of 10 years ago are now in leadership roles, but often missing essential skills for the job. They are 'teaching' the next generation of programme makers on-the-job with the risk of poor practices being passed on again and again.
- there is confidence in on-the-job training to develop within a role. However, there is a misplaced assumption that people are entering industry with the necessary foundation skills to build on. This exposes gaps when productions are under pressure or an individual is stepping up from one role to the next. This has particularly come to the fore since the Covid-19 pandemic, which has fuelled the industry culture of promoting people before they are ready.
- a repeated and related suggestion was that editorial and production talent train alongside each other, learning crossover skills and experiencing the pressures and challenges of each other's roles to foster a broader understanding and appreciation of the demands and responsibilities.
- all qualitative participants identified the essential strategic role of training in maintaining the sector's reputation and ability to deliver top-quality output across a growing market. Adding to the urgency of this, the increasing influence and success of SVODs in the UK's unscripted sector is presenting new challenges for production management and editorial. Interviewees perceived a significant gap in the skills and experience required to compete on the global stage.

Training delivery formats

Feedback from qualitative participants provides strong endorsement for schemes to help people step in, step across and step up. The success of training schemes was regularly referenced in

support of in-work career development, ie programmes that integrate training and mentoring alongside employment to provide structured and supported on-the-job experience. Such schemes are based on applied learning, offering a high degree of workplace relevance.

Value was perceived in online training, particularly where available free of charge and/or available at any time. This level of accessibility was felt to be especially important for freelance production talent in between contracts. For example, there were many references to the value of ScreenSkills' sessions that can be accessed virtually. However, when considering the use of remote delivery, it is important to distinguish between online resources (eg masterclasses, e-learning, self-teaching) and more structured, instructor-led courses, choosing the best format for the skills being developed.

Formal in-person training courses were also acknowledged as important. But the perceived lack of consistency, availability and frequency made it hard to draw further conclusions beyond the previously mentioned need for an industry-standardised approach to training, regardless of delivery method.

Prioritising production management

Both survey and interviews confirm the same headline regarding skills gaps and shortages in the unscripted sector: a crisis in the recruitment and retention of production management staff. There is a talent pipeline issue, with too few production coordinators entering the sector and, at the other end of the hierarchy, the industry haemorrhaging experienced production managers. Reasons for this were identified as:

- at entry level, a fundamental lack of understanding of the production management role and career path
- at more senior levels the role has changed significantly over the last 20 years, resulting in many production managers finding the job unrewarding and leaving the industry
- increased pressure due to requirements such as Albert, Diamond and Covid-19 are now the responsibility of production managers. Though important, these are seen as time-consuming administrative burdens which production managers often feel ill-resourced to execute well
- changed perception of the role has taken away enjoyment, with production managers feeling they have been turned into “the police of production”
- gradual erosion of location filming opportunities due to budget restraints, the streamlining of editorial/production management responsibilities (creating a them-and-us culture), long hours and poor pay, have made the production management pathway increasingly less attractive.

There was a heartfelt call for an industry review of how production management and editorial teams work together and share responsibilities. There needs to be a focus on making production management roles more attractive and raising their profile to attract and retain good people.

Commercial and cultural influences

Championing and promoting careers in unscripted TV

One of the most consistent and repeated themes emerging from qualitative feedback was that more work needs to be done to promote the unscripted sector, in particular production management, as a viable career option from the earliest stages of education. If it were made easier for children and young people, from primary school up, to think about unscripted TV in the way they might consider retail, hospitality or STEM subjects, this could feed the talent pipeline and help resolve some of the industry's most challenging inclusion priorities. Common suggestions to address this included:

ScreenSkills

- a wide-reaching TV advertising/public information campaign to promote career opportunities – aside from engaging school-age children and young adults, this could also target transferrers from other industries
- design and market FE/HE courses with a pragmatic focus on the whole business of programme-making (ie as a commercial as well as creative environment), to better prepare graduates for the reality of working in industry
- FE/HE courses that target or offer a distinct pathway in production management, as opposed to generic 'media' or 'film' qualifications which currently favour editorial admission.

Fostering a culture of inclusion

Most interviewees reflected that unscripted TV production is not an accommodating sector, which creates barriers to inclusion across the board. A culture in which staff are often expected to hit the ground running with little or no training, grow quickly in roles that offer little support, work antisocial and inflexible hours on low pay (at entry and early levels in particular) and on short contracts, disadvantages people from certain backgrounds. It was argued that changing a culture which is largely tied to financial imperatives would be extremely challenging, if not impossible to implement. However, it was suggested that more funded schemes to support and target inclusion linked to contracts of a meaningful length, training, work placements and mentoring could be a progressive approach to incremental change.

Consequences of a specialist-driven editorial culture

The budget-driven culture of streamlining editorial roles in the unscripted sector has steadily become the norm and has created a generation of specialist producers with narrow experience, making it increasingly difficult to find well-rounded editorial leaders.

Many interviewees reflected that the culture in which it is now the norm for editorial talent to follow a specialist path in shooting, casting, directing or editing from an early career stage, makes it increasingly difficult to gain a well-rounded range of experience.

Without adequate support, this approach can become a false economy. Specialising early on in a career can result in achieving high status in one area and a reluctance to take a lower paid, lower status role in another area to gain the appropriate breadth of experience. This presents challenges in securing leadership roles, particularly at the new showrunner level, and leaves producers hitting a plateau relatively early on in their career which can ultimately lead to a decision to leave the industry.

Future research and tracking

Looking beyond 2021/22, the following approaches are suggested as optimal ways to keep abreast of skills issues affecting unscripted TV production:

- adopt a two-year research cycle based on
 - repeating this comprehensive research exercise, ie quantitative survey and qualitative interviews, once every two years
 - conducting a shorter reality check in the intervening year to identify any significant shifts and assess what is/is not working; this could be done either through qualitative research (eg interviews or roundtables) or a survey, depending on the type of feedback required
- continue to use facilitated discussions with council and/or working group members to review each year's findings and derive a priority- and outcome-based action plan for the fund.
- where viable, build impact evaluation measures (as opposed to just output and outcome tracking) into interventions supported by the fund, to better assess the real differences they have made to the unscripted TV sector. For example, consider basing success on qualitative information that demonstrates what difference the training – or other intervention – has made. This could include increases in confidence, network and progression opportunities.

Appendix A: skills shortages and gaps in unscripted TV in the regions and nations

This report is based on a survey, which took place between July and October 2021. Participants were asked up to 14 questions regarding skills gaps and shortages, and barriers to increasing diversity in the region they operate. The survey targeted production companies and staff/freelancers involved in crewing up, in all parts of the UK, making programmes across a range of genres in unscripted. In total, it garnered 114 respondents.

Sample demographics

Please pick the genre you work with most frequently

Genre most frequently worked:	%
Arts and classical music	1%
Education	1%
Current affairs	2%
Sport	2%
Entertainment	11%
Specialist factual	18%
Factual entertainment	32%
General factual	35%

Source: ScreenSkills Unscripted TV Survey (2021) / Sample size: 114

Please tell us where your company is located

Regions	%
Northern Ireland	4%
Wales	4%
Midlands + East of England	6%
South East	6%
North of England	7%
South West	14%
Scotland	15%
London	44%

Source: ScreenSkills Unscripted TV Survey (2021) / Sample size: 114

Approximately how big is the company your work for in terms of turnover?

Turnover	%
Over £50m	10%
Between £10m and £50m	24%
Between £2m and £10m	37%
Under or equal to £2m	30%
Grand Total	100%

Source: ScreenSkills Unscripted TV Survey (2021) / Sample size: 114

Skills shortages

How did you find recruiting/crewing up for the following job roles over the past 12 months?

	Overall mean	East of England + Midlands	London	North of England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales
Production coordinator	4.6	4.1	4.8	4.3	4.8	4.2	4.7	4.9	4.4
Production manager	4.6	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.8	4.4	4.8	4.5	4.2
Editor	4.1	4.4	3.7	3.8	4.0	4.1	3.1	4.2	4.6
Series producer	4.0	4.6	3.7	4.2	4.0	4.3	3.8	3.8	4.6
Exec producer	3.7	4.2	3.7	2.3	4.0	3.9	3.5	3.6	4.6
Development producer	3.7	4.4	3.5	3.8	4.3	4.2	2.8	3.5	4.4
Self-shooting PD	3.6	4.0	3.3	3.9	4.3	3.5	3.8	3.6	4.0
Edit producer	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.9	3.3	3.6	3.0	3.1	4.0
Development AP	3.3	4.0	3.1	3.8	4.3	3.4	2.8	3.1	4.5
Self-shooting AP	3.3	4.2	3.1	3.4	4.3	3.3	3.8	3.1	3.8
Researcher	3.0	3.7	2.9	3.0	2.7	3.0	3.0	2.9	3.4

Source: ScreenSkills Unscripted TV Survey (2021) / Sample size: 114
Highlighted areas are cells in which the figure is higher than the overall mean

Where there any other roles that you experienced as always or often difficult to recruit for over the past 12 months?

London
Production management (6)
Production coordinator (5)
Production secretary (4)
Director (3)
Line producer (3)
Production accountants (2)
Production executives (2)
AP (1)
Archive researcher (1)
DOP (1)
Drama documentary showrunners (1)
DV director (1)
Edit assistant (1)
Edit producer (1)
Editor (1)
Editorial (1)
Engineers (1)
Make-up artists (1)
Post producer (1)
Post supervisor (1)
Producer (1)
Production assistant (1)
Series director (1)
Series editors (1)
Series producer (1)
Technical directors (1)
Workflow specialists (1)

North of England
APs (1)
Casting producer (1)
Development researchers (1)
Video editors (1)

Scotland
Production accountant (2)
Development executive (1)
DIT (1)
Grip (1)
Offline editors (1)
Production coordinator (1)
Showrunner (1)

South East
Edit assistant (1)
Line manager (1)
Line producer (1)
Online editors (1)
Production coordinator (1)
Production executive (1)
Production secretary (1)
QC Ops (1)
Shooting AP (1)
Shooting PDs (1)

South West
Edit assistants (4)
Archive producer (2)
Archive researchers (2)
Production coordinators (2)
APs (1)
Editors (1)
Production accountants (1)
Production managers (1)
Talent managers (1)

Midlands
Casting (1)
Development Producer (1)
Exec Producer (1)
Line Producer (1)
Production Management (1)

Wales
Accountant (1)
Carpenter (1)
Exec producers (1)
Production assistant (1)
Production coordinator (1)
Production secretary (1)
Series producers (1)
VFX (1)

Most critical roles

Which of these roles is most critical to your business in the next 12 months?

	Grand total	East of England + Midlands	London	North of England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	South East	South West
Production manager	40%	14%	46%	25%	75%	18%	20%	57%	56%
Production coordinator	14%	14%	14%	0%	0%	18%	0%	0%	31%
Series producer	12%	14%	12%	0%	25%	24%	20%	0%	6%
Self-shooting P/D	8%	29%	2%	38%	0%	6%	0%	29%	0%
Development producer	6%	14%	6%	0%	0%	0%	60%	0%	0%
Exec producer	4%	0%	6%	0%	0%	12%	0%	0%	0%
Editor	4%	14%	0%	13%	0%	12%	0%	0%	0%
Development AP	2%	0%	0%	13%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Researcher	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Other	8%	0%	12%	13%	0%	0%	0%	14%	6%

Source: ScreenSkills Unscripted TV Survey (2021) / Sample size: 114
 Highlighted areas are cells in which the figure is higher than the overall percentage

Other critical roles over the next 12 months

London
All (2)
Engineers with experience in IP environments (1)
Good directors (1)
Production roles (1)
Post-producer/Bookings (1)

South East
Online editor (1)

South West
Series Director (1)
Director (1)

Skills improvement

Which of the following skills would you like to see improved in the workforce/crew you work with?

	Grand total	London	East of England + Midland	North of England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	South East	South West
Ability to manage and support teams/crew	52%	60%	43%	25%	75%	47%	60%	29%	50%
Financial and budgetary skills	46%	48%	57%	25%	100%	47%	40%	57%	25%
Project management skills	46%	48%	71%	25%	75%	41%	60%	14%	44%
Resilience	44%	44%	29%	25%	50%	35%	40%	71%	56%
Ability to organise work	42%	48%	43%	38%	50%	29%	60%	43%	31%
Ability to set and communicate goals and instructions	37%	38%	29%	38%	50%	29%	60%	57%	25%
Ability to develop or support talent	36%	38%	29%	13%	25%	35%	40%	14%	56%
Respect at work	34%	40%	29%	13%	0%	24%	40%	71%	31%
Interpersonal skills	32%	30%	14%	13%	75%	35%	40%	57%	25%
Scheduling	31%	30%	43%	0%	100%	53%	20%	29%	6%
Ability to deliver/receive feedback	30%	36%	14%	13%	0%	18%	40%	43%	38%
Team-working skills	27%	34%	14%	25%	25%	24%	20%	43%	13%
Delegation skills	26%	26%	29%	13%	50%	41%	20%	43%	6%
Ability to address unconscious bias	23%	30%	29%	0%	0%	12%	20%	14%	31%
HR skills	18%	24%	14%	0%	0%	29%	20%	29%	0%
Covid safety measures skills	18%	20%	29%	13%	25%	18%	20%	14%	13%
Mentoring	14%	14%	29%	0%	0%	24%	20%	14%	6%
General health and safety skills	13%	20%	14%	0%	0%	6%	20%	14%	6%
Ability to onboard new starters remotely	12%	16%	43%	0%	25%	0%	20%	14%	0%
Other	10%	10%	0%	25%	0%	12%	20%	0%	6%

Source: ScreenSkills Unscripted TV Survey (2021) / Sample size: 114
Highlighted areas are cells in which the figure is higher than the overall percentage

Which other skills would you like to see improved in the workforce/crew you work with?

London
All basic skills under the relevant job title - production staff being promoted too early due to lack of resources
Avid training for EPs
Edit skills for PDs and APs
Post-production skills for production coordinators

North of England
Ability to follow house style, record, edit, top n tail titles and credits, to a near final product, which can include personal flair and creativity-within house style.
Across the board production management skills
Video editing

Scotland
Editing and shooting skills
Shooting, especially high-end observational filming

Wales
Ability of staff to recognise the financial and timescale parameters of a project and work within that

Barriers to diversity

Which, if any, of the following barriers do you think your organisation faces in recruiting a more diverse workforce?

	Grand total	London	East of England + Midlands	North of England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	South East	South West
We do not receive many applications from under-represented groups	59%	50%	57%	50%	75%	65%	80%	29%	88%
More could be done to advertise jobs to reach more diverse applications	46%	58%	29%	13%	0%	59%	20%	29%	44%
The quality of applications and applicants from under-represented groups is not at the level we hope to recruit to	42%	44%	14%	25%	25%	53%	60%	14%	56%
Recruitment practice is carried out informally (e.g. through word of mouth)	25%	30%	43%	13%	0%	29%	0%	14%	19%
Lack of training and understanding for hiring staff and managers	20%	32%	14%	0%	0%	12%	20%	14%	13%
No barriers	7%	4%	14%	25%	0%	6%	0%	29%	0%
Production locations are not accessible	5%	2%	29%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	13%
Building or workplace environment is not accessible	4%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%

Source: ScreenSkills Unscripted TV Survey (2021) / Sample size: 114
 Highlighted areas are cells in which the figure is higher than the overall percentage

Other barriers to diversity

London
A cohesive strategy to progress the individuals after 6-12 months, decent money to pay junior staff to get/keep them in the industry, and manageable workloads
I think engaging in more internships to get people in at the bottom up would help with diversity in the industry. Something we are doing
There are no barriers. They don't choose diverse staff
Lack of time to recruit
Seems a small pool of diverse faces, all of whom are hugely in demand.
Production companies do not give people a chance and tend to give the jobs to people who they know, thus making it more difficult to work in the industry.
Time - often required to recruit quickly - meaning availability at short notice is often the first criteria and leaves little option than taking the earlier applicants

South East
Drop the worthiness approach and pay attention to positive recruiting
Major emerging issue is social diversity alongside ethnic diversity. In a freelance industry how do we ensure we attract people from all groups who come from poorer backgrounds and need immediate regular employment

South West
Buy-in from commissioners and the channel
It's important to get out and communicate the range of roles available. Production management and accountant roles are often overlooked in favour of the editorial route.
We're not allowed to ask if someone is from an unrepresented group, so can't take positive action to recruit from these groups. It is still unclear exactly what constitutes the groups (eg socio-economic status, sexuality) and isn't consistent across the broadcasters

North of England
In the south we are very diverse. In the North East, we struggle to recruit BAME, even volunteers. We move quality staff to fill gaps, where possible, or factor in more hotel accommodation, etc.
Broadcasters commission with little notice so a full search is not viable, so we have to fall back on those we know. Broadcasters must properly commit to supporting a search for diverse people with more notice and allow funding to train, eg additional roles not charged to production budget
Working in TV is an expensive and difficult job to get into. Job instability and the fact that often people need to drive and stand out in a competitive market can make it tough to get a first break.

Northern Ireland
Diversity takes different forms in some of the nations and regions

Midlands
Freelance nature of entry level jobs can exclude those from lower socio-economic background

Wales
Better budgets to pay better fees to attract talent
In north Wales, the population has a low percentage of people from non-white backgrounds.
We have proactively recruited a more diverse workforce but tend to receive very few applications

Scotland
Reaching the informal diverse networks that are not necessarily on media recruitment platforms
The short-term freelance culture in our industry

