



# Culture, Media and Sport Committee

## Oral evidence: British film and high-end television, HC 157

Tuesday 21 May 2024

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Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Simon Jupp; John Nicolson; Alex Sobel; Jane Stevenson.

Questions 404 - 520

### Witnesses

[I](#): Georgia Brown, Chair, Screen Sectors Skills Task Force; Dr Jon Wardle, Director, National Film and Television School; and Sara Whybrew, Director of Skills and Workforce Development, British Film Institute.

[II](#): Laura Mansfield, Chief Executive, ScreenSkills; Myriam Raja, Writer and Director; and Dominique Unsworth MBE, Chief Executive, Resource Productions.

[III](#): Philippa Childs, Deputy General Secretary and Head, Bectu; and Marcus Ryder MBE, Chief Executive, Film and TV Charity.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Georgia Brown, Dr Jon Wardle and Sara Whybrew.

Q404 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Throughout our British film and high-end TV inquiry we have heard about the importance of the industry having the skilled workers it needs for the future. Today we are going to be investigating that in more detail with three different panels of very experienced and well-known guests.

Before we begin, do any Members have any interests they would like to declare? No? In that case, I am going to start by introducing our first panel. We have Georgia Brown, who is the chair of the Screen Sectors Skills Task Force, Dr Jon Wardle, who is the director of the National Film and Television School, and Sara Whybrew, who is the director of skills and workforce development at the British Film Institute. You are all very welcome. Thank you so much for joining us today.

I am going to start the questioning with you, Georgia. What challenge does the British film and high-end TV industry face when it comes to skills? What are we looking at here and what is your taskforce saying about how we will address it?

**Georgia Brown:** You will all be familiar with the BFI report from 2022, which stated that, come 2025, there would be a potential shortage of 15,000 to 20,000 crew. The market is in a very different place now. You have heard from lots of people saying similar things, so I will keep it brief. We have hit major economic headwinds, we have had a downturn in advertising revenue and there has been a massive retraction in the market, which is obviously limiting production. We are no longer talking about a skills shortage; we are talking about a job shortage. That is something we recognised in our taskforce report, and it was important for me when I came on board with this project.

For me, looking holistically at this as a challenge, one of the issues to date has been that there have been lots of plasters or short-term, reactive approaches to how we have dealt with the skills challenge in the UK industry. We need to move quickly towards a much more sustainable, long-term approach. We are an industry that will have peaks and troughs. That is the nature of our business. Rather than constantly reacting to that cyclical nature and the fires at the time, whether you are in a peak or a trough, we have to start looking at what a sustained approach would be like—which the report goes into, talking through our recommendations—to sustain growth, looking at the sector vision and the ambitions that people have for the creative industries but also at how to sustain careers for the freelancers that are the bedrock and the dynamism of the UK film and TV industry.

As for how the task force looked to address that, again, when we came in, we made a decision to broaden out the scope compared to what was



discussed within that BFI report. Although that was very much focused on high-end and film, and we are here today talking about high-end and film, it is important that we do not eliminate the other genres. We have to look at children's and we have to look at unscripted. They are critical paths to working in high-end television and film. If we want a sustainable career base for our freelancers, they have to be able to manoeuvre and have flexible careers through all these genres.

We broadened out the scope, we looked at physical production across all genres of television and film. The other thing we did was to take a step back and think much more holistically. When I came into this, there were lots of data quoted at me about the percentage that might be needed to solve this challenge. What was not available to me was: how much are we spending, where are we spending that investment and—very importantly for understanding this and unpicking what the solves could be for the future—what is the value impact of that money we are spending? That became the basis for how we worked and operated throughout the seven or eight-month tenure of reviewing, up until publication of the report.

We did a bespoke investment survey across all our task force members. It is the first time that that had ever been done, which astounded me at the time. We now have the beginnings of some robust data, and they are incredibly stark. Now it is very clear why there is a challenge at mid to senior. Only 27% of our collective investment is going to mid to senior. That is disproportionate when I have the industry telling me that that is a challenge. It is clear that there is a challenge, which means we are not investing enough in that area.

It was fantastic for the task force that people were so transparent with us in that process, which did show, by the way, that although we talk about it very negatively, the industry is investing a significant amount in skills. We were investing over £100 million at that point in 2022, which is over the 1% that was stated to be needed. However, it is not a money question. Throwing more money at this is not going to solve it for any of us. We have to start looking at how effectively the public and private sector work together to get more value impact for the money that is being spent and to put it into the right areas. That is critical.

**Q405 Chair:** Thank you very much. Sara, can I turn to you? We know that the BFI published its skills review in 2022. Based on what Georgia has said, what is the thinking now from the BFI? How many skilled workers do you think the industry needs now and in the future, and can they possibly be delivered via the number of existing training programmes out there?

**Sara Whybrew:** The short answer to the first part of that question is that we do not know. We need more current data to tell us how many workers we now need. As Georgia said, production is not at the rate that we expected it to be when we first undertook the skills review. I suppose there is an ask back, which is to support further data around current workforce needs.



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We at the BFI are also committed to undertaking more skills research over the coming months and years. We want to make sure that there is more current labour market information, and I think Laura Mansfield from ScreenSkills will talk later about the role that our skills body plays in collecting data, too. There is very much a need for further information there.

On the second bit of your question, there is real potential for what is in the system to meet our needs. However, building on what Georgia said, we need even greater intel to tell us what the most appropriate training routes are for the occupations that we need to train people for. There are myriad interventions and schemes, and some of those have not necessarily been independently evaluated to tell us that they are the best possible routes for training people. There are other routes, and I am going to use the A word—apprenticeships—that perhaps could be further maximised, which the task force report also speaks to. Until we have a bit more intelligence and greater evaluation of how well certain routes are working, we cannot make a firm decision about how to make the money work better and where to invest it.

**Q406 Chair:** When do you think you will have that knowledge and information?

**Sara Whybrew:** We are hoping to undertake more research over the next 18 months around skills. I would hope that that could be published by the end of this spending period, in the early part of 2026.

I should add that we have recently undertaken some pilot research around crew mapping, which is a starting place to help us understand at a more local or regional level the skills that we already have in existence in a locality. That will help us identify where there are further gaps, but we also need to work with a range of partners to broaden that work out and make sure that we can build a picture right across the UK.

**Q407 Chair:** We hear time and time again in the evidence we have been taking that our skilled workforce is one of the key reasons we attract investment, particularly from the United States but also from elsewhere around the world, to come and work here in the UK and film here in the UK. Obviously, we need to be doing everything we can to perpetuate that and protect it into the future. To what extent, Jon, do you think there is a proper awareness across the country among young people, parents and teachers of the level of opportunity out there in the industry?

**Dr Wardle:** I think there is a growing awareness that the film and television sector is a proper business and that it provides real jobs. I think there is a lack of awareness about the significant difference in the roles that are available. I do Speakers for Schools a couple of times a year, where you go through the credits with young people and say, "Look, accountants, electricians and lawyers," as well as all the other people they can name. I start by saying, "Name some roles that it takes to make a film or television programme." They talk about actors, directors and cinematographers, and very little else. There is a huge



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amount to do. It is a great thing that the BFI has recently tasked Into Film with providing that careers advice and guidance.

There is a sense that you reap what you sow. If we had done this work 10 years ago, we might be in a better place now, with people coming through in those specialist roles. We need to take a long-term view and start planting those seeds. They will pay off. That is evident to me at the school. We will have 400 people apply to be a director and 30 people apply to be a sound recordist, yet if I was a parent, I would be saying, "Be a sound recordist." There is so much work that you will probably never be out of a job, whereas being a director is a much more tricky path to tread. We have to do much more in telling people about all the great opportunities there are.

**Q408 Chair:** You are getting out and about to Speakers for Schools. Obviously, you can only do a very minimal amount alongside the day job. What innovative ways have you seen, or do you think should be employed, when it comes to spreading the word further? How do we get that message about sound engineers out to parents in Newcastle, for example?

**Dr Wardle:** Five or six years ago, as a school, we did no outreach. We now have an outreach programme. We reach about 6,000 people a year through a mix of attending shows like the Pinewood Futures Festival and the Buckinghamshire Skills Show, putting on webinars that you can get a multi-academy trust to tap into, and getting our graduates to go out to schools. Someone like Myriam, who you are going to hear from later, is a fantastic ambassador. She is a graduate of the school from Slough. Her doing stuff in the local area is key. We are trying to do as much of that as we can, working with local groups.

You talked about a skills shortage. If there is a shortage, it is a shortage of long-term thinking, whether about jobs now or about outreach to create people interested in jobs in the future. We do not take a 10-year view, we do not take a 20-year view, and we then reap the dividends of that.

**Q409 Chair:** Are we seeing evidence that other countries are?

**Dr Wardle:** I would struggle to give a definitive picture on that. When I go to the US, there is much more awareness of the jobs that are available, but I do not know whether that is just because of where they are based.

No, I am not sure whether there are lots of people ahead of us in telling people what a grip is, or a best boy, but we could be leading in that. Covid has created lots of opportunities in webinars and online stuff, which can scale. Those are much more acceptable now than they were maybe five years ago.

**Q410 Julie Elliott:** You mentioned some of the outreach you did. Do you do any outreach to the north-east of England?



**Dr Wardle:** Yes. I visited Alison at North East Screen and we talked about the impacts of the studio there. We have grads in the area. I would not be able to say, “Yes, we definitely speak in these eight schools in Sunderland,” but we recognise that speaking UK-wide is an important part of what we do. We have established hubs now in Leeds, Cardiff and Glasgow. We are looking at where the production centres are and how we wrap skills around that, hence why I visited Alison to talk about what the studio might bring in terms of skills opportunities.

**Julie Elliott:** Thank you. I knew you did that. It was just that everything you mentioned was very south-east based.

Q411 **John Nicolson:** Thank you so much for joining us. I am interested in exploring the question of how people from more disadvantaged backgrounds enter the industry. I saw some deeply worrying Channel 4, which showed that a tiny percentage of people from disadvantaged backgrounds get to enter the industry. I am particularly interested in this because I was the first generation of my family to go to university. I got into the industry, but in a very random way, because somebody heard me speak and invited me to go along and present a youth programme. That was good for me, but it is clearly not an official route in. Do you keep figures for how many people from more disadvantaged backgrounds enter the industry?

**Sara Whybrew:** There is some data available on that.

Q412 **John Nicolson:** What do they show?

**Sara Whybrew:** The BFI has data linked to its own funding programmes about who we benefit. Obviously, we give out national lottery good cause funding, and public benefit has to sit at the heart of that, with a particular focus in our skills work around supporting under-represented talent to make the step into the sector, both above and below the line.

We have some data through the Diamond tool that is used in the sector—

Q413 **John Nicolson:** Which shows what?

**Sara Whybrew:** That we are significantly under-represented in terms of those from black and global majority backgrounds.

Q414 **John Nicolson:** What are the figures?

**Sara Whybrew:** I would need to refer back to those. In fact, I might have those in my notes, if you could give me a moment.

Q415 **John Nicolson:** Okay, I will go down the panel while you check back on that. What Channel 4 found was that only one in 12 creatives in TV and film are from working-class backgrounds. That is shocking.

**Dr Wardle:** According to the Social Mobility Commission, around 38% of the population identifies as being from the lowest socioeconomic background. At the NFTS—



Q416 **John Nicolson:** Self-identification is a different matter because lots of people do not want to self-identify as coming from, as you put it, the lowest social end. Who wants to call themselves “the lowest social end”?

**Dr Wardle:** That number is quite high—38%.

Q417 **John Nicolson:** It is up to the people in charge of the industry to decide who comes from a disadvantaged background and then to prioritise them, surely, which is not happening.

**Dr Wardle:** The national measure that the Social Mobility Commission has come up with is 38%. In the NFTS, we are at 17% in Beaconsfield, but 30% in Wales, so we are seeing the benefit of getting out of our base in Beaconsfield into other parts of the country.

We see that scholarships are the key to our making a change in that area. We raise about £500,000 a year through a gala that we run. “The Crown” just auctioned off all its cars, props and costumes and gave us £1,000,000 from that auction.

Q418 **John Nicolson:** Is this all working? Are the figures getting better?

**Dr Wardle:** Yes, they are getting better, although much more slowly than they need to.

Q419 **John Nicolson:** From where to where?

**Dr Wardle:** We have gone from 12% to 17% in three years and we need to get to 38%. We have a long way to go.

**Georgia Brown:** I would say that, to date, there has been some excellence in this area. There is a lot of passion driving people wanting to improve these figures. When you look at the figures, the stark reality is that we are not moving quickly enough. The reason I personally believe that, having sat on the task force over the last nine months, is that we are missing—which is what we are now rectifying—a pan-sector strategic body to act as the driving force in setting up a framework to enable us to speak with one voice, both to Government and in outreach, and to improve statistics like this.

A great example of that is the apprenticeship levy. The BBC released data showing that the apprenticeship levy is directly correlated to increasing our ability to have a more diverse pool of workers. It is an area of huge opportunity for us. We will talk a lot about the apprenticeship levy, I know—

**Chair:** We will come on to the apprenticeship levy.

**Georgia Brown:** It is a huge opportunity, and I am optimistic about it. If the public and private sector could find a way to come together and unlock some of these challenges around the cost structure framework, that would be the single most valuable way of increasing these statistics.





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Q420 **John Nicolson:** We have a voluntary levy at the moment, don't we?

**Georgia Brown:** We do.

Q421 **John Nicolson:** At 0.5% or thereabouts?

**Georgia Brown:** Yes.

**Sara Whybrew:** Yes.

Q422 **John Nicolson:** That is pretty half-hearted. What percentage subscribe to the voluntary levy and what percentage choose not to?

**Georgia Brown:** I do not have that data, I am afraid. We can follow up on that.

**John Nicolson:** Does anybody know the answer to that?

**Dr Wardle:** Laura will know, who is on the panel after us, because she collects the funds.

Q423 **John Nicolson:** I would have thought this was pretty crucial. If you have a levy and no one much is subscribing to it, it is a pointless levy, isn't it?

**Sara Whybrew:** We know how much is going into the levy per year, if that is—

Q424 **John Nicolson:** No, I am more interested in the percentage than the total figure, because that way we can compare with our competitors. Spain, for example, has a 2% levy, and I know that Denmark is moving towards a 5% levy. They are compulsory levies. We are on 0.5% levy, which is voluntary, and the three of you do not know off the top of your head what it raises. It is all a bit nebulous.

Before I hand back to the Chair, let us talk a bit about the Anglo-centrism and London-centrism of so much of the industry, which may have a consequence for people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are getting into the industry. It is striking, isn't it, that the so-called National Film and Television School is based in Buckinghamshire? For those watching who are not completely au fait with English geography, that is the very south of England, just outside London. I have to ask which nation is being catered for in the Buckinghamshire National Film and Television School. The website talks about developing British talent, but the so-called British Film Institute is on the south bank in London. You would be forgiven for feeling you are a bit excluded if you come from the highlands, would you not? Can I start with you, Ms Brown?

**Georgia Brown:** I cannot comment on the NFTS—that might be better directed to Jon—but I would say generally that decentralisation and the move out of London is critical. One of the key recommendations from the task force, from looking at the industry over the last nine months, is that partnership is critical. Working with the screen agencies to ensure that there is local implementation and a local strategy, and that we have outreach, is really important. They were a big part of the voice of the





task force and were already making some significant moves in that department.

Q425 **John Nicolson:** It is not really happening yet. The names, I think, tell a story, don't they—Buckinghamshire, south bank of London?

**Dr Wardle:** I would say that the school was started by a Scot, it has a proud tradition of having Lynne Ramsay, Bill Forsyth and Andrew Macdonald among its graduates, and in the last five years since I became director we have started hubs in Wales, Leeds and Glasgow.

Q426 **John Nicolson:** That it was started by a Scot is neither here nor there. That is a bit like saying that Scotland controlled the UK Government because Gordon Brown was the Chancellor. He just happened to be born in Scotland.

**Dr Wardle:** This year we have launched something called the Sean Connery Talent Lab, funded by the Sean Connery Foundation. It takes 30 of the most talented Scottish filmmakers across a variety of roles and works with them through a year-long programme to create a significant short film. We have gone out and raised that money philanthropically to pay for that.

**Sara Whybrew:** The BFI is committed to investing funds UK-wide and outside of London. Our BFI skills cluster investment is targeted at supporting the development of training locally, and over 60% of that investment goes outside London, into the nations and the north of England. Our BFI Film Academy programme targets areas of greatest disadvantage around the country so that young people who are disadvantaged, and particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are supported to make the step into filmmaking for the first time.

**John Nicolson:** In theory.

**Sara Whybrew:** Well, our data shows that the significant majority of BFI Film Academy participants are from under-represented backgrounds across the UK.

Q427 **Chair:** Thank you very much, John. Georgia, just very quickly, two weeks ago we met some of the inward investors and we were asking them whether they are spending this recommended 1% of their budgets on skills. I do not know if you saw that evidence, but most of them could not tell me. What does that say to you?

**Georgia Brown:** Among the taskforce members—this was the investment survey that we conducted, which included the major studios and a lot of the inward investment coming into the UK—we are collectively spending more than the 1%, or over £100 million a year.

What I keep coming back to is that it is not a percentage question. It is not a money question. Throwing more money at it is not going to solve



this; it will exacerbate the problem. What we need to do is fundamentally reorganise how we are operating, to effectively deploy that capital in the right areas to get maximum value back.

To be quite frank, I think we are spending a significant amount on skills, there are some incredible schemes and there is real excellence in this area, but collectively it is just not adding up to the sum of its parts. It is not making a difference and it is certainly not happening quickly enough. We need to get some real momentum behind this.

The only way to do that is to start to understand—with better data, insight and a strategic body that can come up with a greater UK-wide framework while locally implementing and working with local bodies—where we need to spend the money. What is the maximum value that we can get to start to supercharge this? Adding more money will not necessarily solve the problem. That is my worry.

**Q428 Jane Stevenson:** I was fascinated by some of John's questions about access for people from working-class backgrounds. I represent Wolverhampton, which has one of the highest youth unemployment rates, and it is striking that the accommodation cost alone for training at your school would completely lock out most Wulfrunian young people.

However, I want to turn to making changes mid-career. Georgia, you have mentioned that only 27% of investment in skills is going on that mid-career upskilling. Is this becoming the workplace equivalent of, "Stack them high, sell them cheap"? Is it just, "Get loads of people in. They are disposable. Then we will get the next lot"? How has that come to be?

**Georgia Brown:** Honestly, I do not think there has been that much thought behind it. As I said, skills is a deeply complicated and incredibly fragmented world. There are a number of different organisations, agencies and so on all trying to solve the same thing, without any holistic data or mapping of what that means. That means that investment is going into the wrong areas. That is why we do need a greater strategic direction, which is what Laura, I think, will talk to you about. When it comes to mid-career—

**Q429 Jane Stevenson:** It is not a new problem, is it?

**Georgia Brown:** No, absolutely not.

**Q430 Jane Stevenson:** How are we still so in the dark about it?

**Georgia Brown:** Because, in my opinion, there is no one cohesive voice of the industry. It is fragmented. It has been managed by lots of silos. For the first time now we are coming together cohesively as an industry with one voice and putting together a strategic body that will be the beacon for that.

On the mid to senior career level, it was interesting to me when the data came back. Across all our focus groups and discussions, mid-career



development came up a lot. It has a huge detriment when you are promoting people too soon, and we saw that exacerbated throughout covid. That boom in the industry had a huge impact on mental health. That has a huge knock-on impact on our ability to retain crew and the real knowledge that is needed in the industry.

Personally, I think that there is not enough investment going towards the leadership side. People have very good on-the-job knowledge of what is needed. When you are adding into that managing other people, that is not something that has been supported. That is something that the industry is now taking note of, and there have been a number of schemes announced even this week. But, again, all these schemes are reactions. We need a much bigger, holistic and long-term view of how to solve this.

I found it fascinating that six months of our time was spent discussing a hypothesis that there was a challenge at mid-level, and then seeing the data that only 20% of our money was spent there. You think, "Well, of course, there's a problem." Why have we not come together before? Why have we not been collecting this data? We have to, with real urgency, set up this strategic way to start pulling this data together, to empower organisations pan-UK to make better decisions and get better impact for that money, whether that is public or private.

**Q431 Jane Stevenson:** Thank you. Jon, you were a curriculum head before your current role. Are you getting messages from industry to say what your curriculum should cover, and do you speak to your students about progression? Do you say, "Once you are in, what is your 30-year plan in the industry?" What is happening there now?

**Dr Wardle:** I am working with the industry. We have a 95% graduate employment rate within six months. People get a job in the area that they have trained in. We know we are meeting a skills challenge.

We are now working much more collaboratively with industry partners to design provision. We worked with Disney a couple of years ago to develop a proper production accounting diploma. It is not targeted at new entrants, but at people with an existing finance background who want to move into film and television production. Maybe you are an accountant for a bank or an insurance company and you now want to work on a Marvel project. Disney pays 75% of the fees for the students doing that course, which is part time and online, and it provides a work experience placement. We have multiple examples of those.

**Q432 Jane Stevenson:** They are already in the industry?

**Dr Wardle:** No, they are in an adjacent industry like insurance and they want to move into film and television. They have a finance background but they have no film and TV experience. Disney pays for them to transfer, effectively. It wants people who can read a cash flow and who know what a profit and loss is, but do not know what a location budget looks like or how to pay the above-the-line costs. It pays 75% of the fees



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and it offers them a guaranteed work placement. Disney's view is that we need to grow the pool of production accountants.

That is a relatively new phenomena for me. I have been in education 20 years and it is only in the last five that I have had companies coming to me saying, "We will pay for this." I have that with post-production supervisors and script supervisors with the BBC. There are lots of industry partners coming and saying, "This is our skills challenge. We will help pay for it."

**Q433 Jane Stevenson:** Are any of your training models working with people part time? That seems like quite a reasonable route, but not for people who are already doing something on a lot or in a film studio.

**Dr Wardle:** The accounting one is part time. We have a whole other set of courses. We run a short course portfolio that works with about 2,300 people a year—1,000 people in Beaconsfield and just under 1,500 across the UK. They are people coming to us and saying that they want to know more about this particular camera, this game engine technology or artificial intelligence, for example. We are probably one of the biggest providers of CPD.

The biggest challenge is that if you are a freelancer, you have to give up earning a daily rate to do that course, and you have to pay for that course. That is where ScreenSkills has played a valuable role, providing bursary money for freelancers to access those courses. We rely on that because many freelancers will look at this and say that they cannot pay £300 for a two-day course, but we will apply to ScreenSkills to cover the cost. Bits of the system do work, and we need to push into those bits.

**Q434 Jane Stevenson:** As well as knit them together, perhaps, a little bit better. Sara, can I ask you what the BFI's plans are to address mid-career progression? What are your thoughts?

**Sara Whybrew:** Above the line, we already have a programme on our own productions called Step Up, which is about supporting talent to progress into more senior roles. Through our skills cluster programme, which is delivered across the UK, some of our clusters are upskilling the existing workforce in specialist skills. For example, in Northern Ireland and Scotland there is a focus on supporting existing workers to develop virtual production skills, where we know there is a shortage.

We have recently launched our good work programme, and a delivery partner for that will be announced in the coming weeks. As part of that, there will be free-to-access management training for those who manage people, as well as leadership support and training, to speak Georgia's point earlier, and other transferable training. We also have to recognise that at the BFI, because we are using national lottery funding, there are obviously rules around that funding and what we can do with it.

There is a broader need here to create professional development frameworks for our industry. We do not have those and, therefore,



benchmarking around occupational competence at all levels is not consistent or necessarily clear. We would also advocate for working in partnership, particularly with ScreenSkills, the skills body, to develop some continuous professional development frameworks for our industry, because we do not have them at the moment.

**Q435 Jane Stevenson:** I was a freelancer for the whole of my career. If you are not working, you are not earning any money. Should the onus not be on the studio, while people are working in the studio, to be upskilling people while they are doing their contracts?

**Dr Wardle:** Warner Bros has made an interesting move in that area this year, which it could probably talk to you about. It has set up a thing called CrewHQ. It has created a training centre within Leavesden Studios so that if you are on a project, you can go at lunchtime or after the show and do something. We are a bit involved in delivering training as part of that. That is a very interesting model because you have a captive audience onsite. How do you invest in them before they move on to another show?

**Jane Stevenson:** That is really interesting.

**Q436 Damian Green:** Can we move on to the formal education sector—schools and universities? I note that the BFI report said that 66% of the workforce holds a degree but that “degree programmes are not adequately training individuals for the jobs we need people to do”. There is clearly a mismatch there. Can I ask Georgia first—this is a general thing—what would help educational providers at all levels, both schools and universities, to deliver more useful skills for the industry?

**Georgia Brown:** HE/FE was a key strand as one of the sub-groups we ran throughout our taskforce, and Jon was on it. He can probably talk in a bit more detail to that.

Interestingly, they struggle in the way that we have struggled. There is no governing body or strategic voice talking on behalf of everybody. It is very fragmented, as is our industry. I am sure that, from an HE perspective, we seem fairly impenetrable, and vice versa. That causes issues in having an actual sit-down conversation at a level where you can be talking on behalf of an entire industry and education.

I would say that there is a lot of outreach, as Jon has talked about, in terms of going directly to schools and different education providers. I work a lot with Bournemouth University, looking at its programmes. However, at the end of the day, the data from our survey were very clear. They showed us that the industry values work-based training and they want people to be set-ready. A lot of the courses are classroom-based, and that does not necessarily set up young folk coming into the industry to be ready to go on set, understand set etiquette and, therefore, flourish. There is a huge amount of work that needs to be done there.



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HE is a much longer-term strand that we need to deal with. In fact, we have continued that workflow. We have not shut that down. We are continuing to do that, beyond the scope of releasing our report, to find solutions, working with people like NAHEMI to come together and understand what we can do to engage better, partner better, and solve both of our prospective issues, because we are so intrinsically linked.

Q437 **Damian Green:** Does the same apply to FE, at the sub-degree level?

**Georgia Brown:** It is slightly different. Again, therein lies the problem. There is a lot of fragmentation and different challenges applying to different institutions. That is, I would say, a much longer-term challenge, and we need to start putting the groundwork in now. It is all about partnership, having much more open communication and a much more cohesive dialogue across the whole of the industry and the education sector on how we can tackle that.

**Damian Green:** At the moment, you have two amorphous masses unable to communicate with each other.

**Georgia Brown:** We do, and it is very challenging but the taskforce has started to pave the way for that. Jon, I do not know if you want to talk more about the work that you were doing as part of that strand. It might help clarify.

**Dr Wardle:** Before we talk about universities, I would just say that this all starts a lot younger than that. It is critical that the work Baroness Bull is doing on the cultural education plan is finished, supported and financed. If you look at what has happened with music education, it has been much better supported and there is much more provision in that area than there is for other creative arts subjects. That is critical because students are now not getting exposed to such a wide range of cultural and creative practices as they used to, and that will have an impact on who applies for FE courses, who applies for universities and who then wants to work in our sector.

Coming on to universities, first, there is no problem with recruitment in film and television courses in universities. They are very popular. Thousands of people want to do them every year. They provide a valuable space for students to find collaborative partners, for creative thinking and problem solving, and to explore different roles. Do I want to do sound? Do I want to be a director? Do I want to do editing?

The big problem, as Georgia said, is connecting that with the workplace. Industry has to step up in that, as well with things like work placements. When I was at a university before I was at the film school, helping a student get a meaningful work placement for four weeks was incredibly difficult, whereas I would look across to my colleagues in business and they would have integrated degrees where people were going off for a year. That just does not exist in our sector.





It all spins off the fact that it is a freelance, fragmented, pop-up production industry. It is incredibly difficult to marry work experience with jobs, but we have to solve that, and I think a spirit of partnership is the key. Traditionally, we have done kitemarking and accreditation. We have not asked how we could help make their course better or really got involved, offering work experience and speakers.

**Q438 Damian Green:** It also goes to the geographical diversity point, doesn't it? If the industry wants people to have had at least a work placement experience, then particularly for 16 and 17-year-olds that will have to be near where they live.

**Dr Wardle:** Yes, although I did not answer part of the question earlier, which was, "How are you preparing graduates for the world as it is today?" Broadcast and streaming are not the only game in town. There is a huge diversity of work around branded content and online advertising. We talk to our students about the world as it is today, rather than what it was 10 years ago. If you are in Bournemouth, there is a huge advertising community there and lots of online developers. Work experience might take a different form there to what it might take in Manchester or Bristol.

**Sara Whybrew:** Can I add to that? Further education is well placed to support the development of skills in our craft and technical roles. We have myriad further education institutions right across the UK that deliver carpentry courses, electrical training and so on, which do not talk about the application of those skills in our sector. We need to change some of that, to make sure that when we train people in those fields, we are also helping them understand how they can take those skills and apply them in this industry. It is the same with accountancy. Production accountancy is one of our biggest skill shortages, as you have already heard.

On the broader piece about specific technical and occupational training versus broader training for inquiry, we need to understand the difference in purpose between the two. I think we sometimes merge the conversation. There is a real opportunity to develop some higher-level technical provision that does not necessarily need to go to quite the level of difficulty that our undergraduate and postgraduate degrees do. In some instances, where we know we have occupational need, we do not need that level of training to train people well. What we need are consistent standards and a consistent understanding about what defines occupational competence per occupation to help shape training for that.

**Q439 Damian Green:** Are we getting to the point where if you have—like, say, in Bournemouth—a university that specialises in the creative sector more generally, you get a cluster around it? Is that happening anywhere else?

**Sara Whybrew:** Obviously, the BFI, as I think you are aware, has invested in skills clusters across the UK. They are in areas of the country where we have major production happening and where further production growth is forecast. Skills clusters are tasked with working with multiple partners in their area, including further and higher education institutions,





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to try to improve the provision that is offered locally and to create more responsive training in relation to the needs of production in that area.

In turn, clusters are also working to support a much greater diversity of talent from within local communities to train and progress into below-the-line roles in production, where we need them.

**Damian Green:** I will stop there and let Julie talk about Sunderland.

Q440 **Julie Elliott:** Thank you. I love the way my city keeps getting mentioned. It is wonderful.

I want to move on to apprenticeships, which I know a few of you have alluded to so far. Sara, how could apprenticeships fit into the picture of training for the UK workforce, and what changes need to happen for this to be a reality?

**Sara Whybrew:** We know that the structure of apprenticeship training is sound as an actual training route—that 80% on the job and 20% off-the-job training mix. There have been challenges with the delivery of apprenticeships in this sector because of our transient working patterns, versus the structural rules that apply to apprenticeships and the continuous 12-month employment rule. We are delighted to be working with myriad partners and the Department for Education in England to pilot portable apprenticeships—that is in development at the moment—which will enable apprenticeships to be used in line with shorter-term working patterns.

Q441 **Julie Elliott:** How would that work?

**Sara Whybrew:** It will enable the recruitment of apprentices short term, in line with the reality of when work is available, and it will allow people to build up their skills on the job in line with the reality of when work is available. It will waive the minimum 12-month continuous employment rule, which is what our sector cannot commit to. We are delighted that the DFE is supporting that change. Jon at NFTS is also looking to build on the flexi-job apprenticeship agency model, which does still meet and require the continuous 12-month employment rule but through multiple placements. The portable model is just one layer of flexibility on from that model. We are still designing the pilot with industry and ScreenSkills at the moment, but we hope that it will enable greater use of the apprenticeship training route.

We also, in fairness, need to make sure we have specialist training provision and providers available to support apprenticeship delivery, so that the off-the-job training is sound and relevant. The more we can do to support industry to get involved in designing, developing and even co-delivering that off-the-job training, the stronger we can make our apprenticeship provision.

Q442 **Julie Elliott:** Georgia, you have mentioned apprenticeships as being a huge opportunity, and Sara has already mentioned some of the changes



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being made, working with the DFE. If you had the ear of the Department for Education, what changes to the apprenticeship levy would you recommend?

**Georgia Brown:** Sara has already alluded to the structural issue that we face around SMEs providing continuous employment, which is a real challenge within our industry.

In terms of relevance, we are not training for the skills most needed and valued in the way that we need. Accounting is a good example of that, and production accounting.

The thing that I do not think is discussed enough is the actual cost, particularly at moments like now. We are going through a difficult time as an industry. We are an industry that is propelled by SMEs, and these things are too hard and too costly. The employers cannot afford the costs associated with the apprenticeship structure as it stands.

Throughout all the work we have done over the last nine months, the reason I am so excited about apprenticeships is that, if there is a way that Government and industry could come together and have a meaningful discussion about the steps that we could take to look at reform that would make this a fit-for-purpose structure, with an apprenticeship levy for the industry, we would unlock—

Q443 **Julie Elliott:** What reform are you talking about?

**Georgia Brown:** Exactly what we were talking about. There is the structural issue of continuous employment. With the nature of our business, it just is not possible for many people to access. SMEs cannot access this apprenticeship levy. It is too costly for them. They cannot afford it. There are associated costs that are quite often not discussed around wages and the support that has to go around having an apprenticeship. The industry could come together with Government and have a discussion around costs and how we can tackle that.

Why I am excited and why I think the industry is so optimistic about this is that if you unlock those things, we could unlock some of our skills challenges at such scale. We welcome the changes that have been made—increasing the numbers of providers like Jon has been fantastic—but they are not solving the problem at scale. Apprenticeships have a direct correlation to increasing the diversity of our workforce. As Jon was speaking to earlier, that is a huge problem, and if we unlocked this, it would be quite game-changing.

Q444 **Julie Elliott:** Can I clarify? You are not suggesting that people doing apprenticeships should not be paid?

**Georgia Brown:** Gosh, no, quite the opposite.

**Julie Elliott:** You were not quite being clear.



**Georgia Brown:** Sorry, I was talking about the SMEs or the employers. It does work for some people; there are bigger organisations like the BBC that can offer continuous employment and it could work for them. But the majority of the industry is made up of a project-based, freelance workforce that is often propped up by smaller SMEs. It is just not possible for them to take on the burden of some of these costs, and that is what we have to come together and think about.

Q445 **Julie Elliott:** Going off on a sideways thing from something you said before, you have mentioned this strategic body a number of times. Do you foresee this body having local flexibility?

**Georgia Brown:** It is more than local flexibility. My view is that it is decentralised. There should be no centralised power within a strategic body. It is simply there to garner data and insights, and to provide a framework to partner with local agencies across the breadth of the UK to help them put their strategic frameworks in place. It is not for that body to tell organisations or local agencies how they should be spending or where, but it can provide the insight and data holistically to help guide them. I think that would be very empowering.

Q446 **Julie Elliott:** Jon, Chris Bird from Amazon called for high-quality training providers to be incentivised to provide apprenticeships. What support do you think is needed, and what would encourage other providers to get involved?

**Dr Wardle:** It is so tricky. I have been involved in education for 20 years, and the last year of working hard to get apprenticeship provision off the ground has probably been the hardest thing we have done. Why is it so hard? Well, you are meeting rules and regulations from both the ESFA and Ofsted. Some of those rules feel rather odd. Just to give you an example, for every tutor we bring in on our production management apprenticeship with Amazon, we have to do a whole series of social media checks about them. I do not do that on any of my BA courses or MA courses, but it is a requirement of Ofsted that you do that work and that you can evidence that you have done all those checks on every guest speaker who comes in. That is just one example of the myriad additional regulations, rules and bureaucracy that get put around delivery.

We have ended up in the market with private training providers trying to meet those rules and obligations, with maybe two or three people in a private training business trying to navigate all those rules and failing sometimes, or not having the breadth of specialist tutoring expertise. On one hand, they are trying to deliver production accounting and, on another, production management, which are quite different things.

Universities are uninterested in it because there is not enough money to incentivise them to get involved. They look at it and think, "All these rules, all this regulation, all this risk." It is a big risk for them. They might join a sector and they have to then pass their Ofsted check. You do not want to fail. As a higher education provider, we are not covered by Ofsted



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until we do apprenticeships. I think lots of people have just gone, "Too tricky, too difficult."

Because we are partially funded by the industry, our board took the decision 18 months ago to go for it. We have put a huge amount of resource into it. We now have a pilot programme with Amazon that is just about to enter year 2. We have a new apprenticeship starting with the BBC in September. We are talking with Disney and with ITV.

I agree with Georgia. On our own, we are not going to solve the scale problem, but if we can get to 100 apprentices, that would be quite a big proportion of the apprentices in the film and TV space. There are only about 600 at any one time. If my institution can contribute 100 or 150 people, it would be a big boon.

I would also say quickly, going back to the levies that we talked about previously, that people are paying a production levy. They are also paying into the apprenticeship levy and seeing nothing back from it. About £23 million gets paid in by film and TV companies annually that just does not get used.

Q447 **Julie Elliott:** How would you see the apprenticeship levy being reformed to assist with the issues in your industry?

**Dr Wardle:** There are the things that Sara talked about in terms of the portability and the three-month structures. Then there is a genuine question: if you are not working with under-18s, do lots of these rules around apprenticeships apply? I understand that there are safeguarding requirements if you are working with those aged under 18, and there is some of that with adults, but it is designed in the most labyrinthine, bureaucratic way. The guys at the DFE are incredibly helpful in navigating you through it, and we are an organisation that can resource that to a certain extent, but I think a lot of people just look at it and go, "This is too difficult."

**Sara Whybrew:** If we can make apprenticeships work well structurally for this sector, there is scope for us to better maximise use of the apprenticeship levy. There is also scope for further flex in the use of that levy. Going back to the issues that we discussed earlier around professional development, the levy could be split or further flexed to invest in continuous professional development interventions, which might potentially be shorter and sharper if we had a continuous professional development framework for our industry and we knew how to benchmark training.

If that levy could also be invested in supporting CPD interventions that are structured and validated in the same way that apprenticeships and other formal training routes are, we would then have the potential to make the levy work much harder for our industry and result in better outcomes, while also making sure that there are quality standards in place for training in the industry. I hope that makes sense.



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Q448 **Chair:** Thank you all so much for appearing in front of us today. Were there any points that you wanted to make that you have not had the opportunity to raise with us so far?

**Sara Whybrew:** I would love to. I think Philippa and Marcus will talk a bit about this later, but it is also important that we understand the impact that working conditions have on retaining people in the industry and how important it is that we look at that in this mix. As I said, I suspect Philippa and Marcus will talk about that a bit later.

**Dr Wardle:** I think we have covered it. My own plea is that we need to move away from this feast-and-famine approach and focus much more on long-term thinking. For me, the critical thing is that I am training people. They want to work in our industry. What is the pathway through? How do they leave and establish their careers?

At the school, we are very fortunate that we have great professional relationships and we are able to leverage those, but for lots of young people they look at it and it feels incredibly impenetrable. I hope that the new independent film tax relief will create a whole series of productions at a different tier, which will create entry routes in for young people and for people looking to transfer careers and change what they are doing.

**Georgia Brown:** If we can find a way to partner better between public and private investment, to look at how we invest together and how we work together to have maximum impact and effect for the money we are spending, it would go such a long way.

I have one last response because you talked about the tax credit. I think you mentioned at the start that inward investors are here because of our fantastic crew. They are, but let's not kid ourselves: they are also here because we offer an incredible economic position for them to come into. I am conscious, going into a general election, that continued support from the Government in terms of a tax credit is incredible because it does stimulate production, and production spend is what pays for skills. Anything that is detrimental to that in the future is a concern for us. Continued commitment to maintaining the tax credit, as a direct correlation to funding skills, is important.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. You have all landed your points very well today. I am going to now move on to our second panel. You are all free to go.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Laura Mansfield, Myriam Raja and Dominique Unsworth.

Q449 **Chair:** For our second panel today we have Laura Mansfield, who is the chief executive of ScreenSkills, Dominic Unsworth MBE, who is the chief executive of Resource Productions, and Myriam Raja, who is the lead director of the latest season of TV BAFTA-winning "Top Boy". Thank you so much to you all for joining us today.



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I want to kick off very quickly, Laura, with you. We have heard from the BFI that it does not have data on the sector's skills needs. I know you are new in the role, but surely that is the very role of ScreenSkills. ScreenSkills should be able to provide us with data on the skills and where the need is. Why does the sector not have that overview, and what has ScreenSkills been doing over this period?

**Laura Mansfield:** Thank you for the question. As you said, I am new in the role—I just joined in January—and the degree of urgency in attacking this issue, because it is so important to the industry, is something I am very conscious of.

I welcome the work of the task force, which has identified that there is a real need for that central strategic body. There is a need for us all to work together to gather that data and to be able to share and disseminate it, and for industry to have come together and supported that.

Certainly, to date, ScreenSkills has pulled together considerable amounts of data, but it may be partial. For example, the high-end TV fund brought out data last week about skills gaps and shortages, but it is focused on that area. What we need to do now is look at consistent, year-on-year data that speaks right across the piece, and looks at not just skills gaps and shortages but where investment is going.

As Georgia said, for the first time the whole industry came together with the taskforce to identify how much money was going into skills and how much investment there was right across the piece. Now there is an opportunity for us to put together consistent data to inform not only investment decisions by companies and indies, but also freelancers and individuals about where they want to put their careers and their energy. Looking forward, that is the role that we see as important for us to take.

Q450 **John Nicolson:** Thank you very much indeed for joining us. Could I ask you a little bit about decentralisation? Perhaps I can come to you, Ms Mansfield, first of all. There is a problem, isn't there, with a London-based organisation in charge of an industry that is being run by a whole series of devolved Administrations? There is a separation. When I talk to people in the industry in Scotland, they say repeatedly that they do not feel represented in the way that perhaps you think they would like to feel.

**Laura Mansfield:** There are a number of points that you have made in that question that I would love to unpack. Certainly, the base of ScreenSkills is in London. However, we have a workforce and representation that is right across the whole UK. As someone who enjoys working in the office, I can see that I have teams spread right across the UK, with representatives in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. We also have working groups within the different skills funds that are based across the UK and in all the nations. That is one point I am very keen to make.





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The second point is that we are not in charge of the industry. That is an important point to make. What we are, hopefully, doing is looking forward with this new strategy from the task force and putting ourselves in a position to facilitate partnerships and collaboration between public and private, and between different organisations, to ensure that people work together and share what their skills needs are and what they are doing, so that, together, we can put together a map of where that skills provision is and where the job opportunities are, and then lean into what needs doing in different areas.

Q451 **John Nicolson:** Before you appeared, my office was phoning around asking leading figures in the industry what they felt was happening and how well the system was working. Here is what one said: the one-size-fits-all approach, centred around a London-based organisation like ScreenSkills does not work, because it does not recognise “the devolved context for developing skills,” and that is a significant problem in terms of enjoying a “trusted relationship with local crews, facilities and producers.” I am hearing time and time again that the skills cluster approach is one that people appear to prefer, because of the funding mechanisms and the importance put on decentralisation. How do you counter that?

**Laura Mansfield:** I do not think that those points are necessarily mutually exclusive. I think that we can both acknowledge the real value of skills clusters and a localised approach, particularly in relationships with local education providers, FE and HE, and of a convening and strategic approach.

Certainly, I do not recognise the one-size-fits-all approach. The way that the five skills funds operate is that each has multiple working groups, all made from industry and from on-the-ground practitioners in film and television companies across the genres, not just in film and HE TV but also in animation, children’s and unscripted.

Q452 **John Nicolson:** I suppose the bottom line is that people think you are too remote, you are too centralised and you are too London and Anglo-centric to be able to understand what is happening in the different nations—not you personally but your organisation.

**Laura Mansfield:** I hope it is a myth that we can begin to bust. Fundamentally, it is about working in partnership. Since I joined in January, it is those partnerships and those collaborations, as well as working together to hear about people’s needs and about investment opportunities, that we have been keenest to do.

**John Nicolson:** I know the other panellists have questions for you, so I will hand back now. Thank you.

Q453 **Julie Elliott:** Good morning. Laura, in the last panel we heard about apprenticeships, and ScreenSkills has led on the two Government pilots. What are the challenges of taking the lessons from those pilots to a national scale that fits the needs of the industry and the Government?





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**Laura Mansfield:** As Georgia said, apprenticeships are a real opportunity. They are proven to improve diversity of entryways. Certainly, the two pilots that we did had a greater diversity of people coming in, with 20% from minority ethnic backgrounds, as opposed to below 18% for other schemes and initiatives. It had a good employment record afterwards, with 76% going on to secure ongoing employment. That pathway is an exciting opportunity.

However, there are some issues. Previously, Sara mentioned some of the challenges around the duration of apprenticeships, but the duration is not the only key issue. Employers must also bear costs for the training part of the apprenticeship. During that time, the employer pays the apprentice's wage.

There are also the pieces in between the training. In the two flexi-job apprenticeship pilots that ScreenSkills did with lead partners Amazon, Netflix, Warner Bros, Sky and a range of independent production companies, the lead large organisations, who had the levy, needed to lean in further and support further costs, but for the smaller companies who were taking the apprentices for shorter periods of time, and that makes the structure really quite expensive.

Q454 **Julie Elliott:** Are you suggesting that the companies that have the apprentices working for them for these periods should not pay them?

**Laura Mansfield:** No, I am not suggesting that at all.

Q455 **Julie Elliott:** I do not understand what you are saying, then. In terms of bearing the cost, what do you mean?

**Laura Mansfield:** Apprenticeships have a range of costs. There are the wages of the apprentice and potentially the additional top-ups needed for them to travel to the training provider. There may be additional costs of co-ordination, administration and support.

The flexi-job pilot has a main employer and then the apprentice moves to different production companies during, because the contract lengths may be shorter. Those bits in between the placements need to be covered and paid for when the apprentice may not be working. The off-the-job training needs to be covered, and the administration in securing placements and, in some cases, supporting bursaries. Organisations such as Amazon provided support and additional masterclasses.

Jon made the point earlier that the range of training providers is quite limited at the moment, particularly in the north of England. The south and south-east have greater provision of training providers right now. Rolling apprentices out is about adding flexibility in covering off-the-job training, incentivising a broader range of providers to provide quality training, and adding all those different pieces up.

Communicating and decoding is a challenge. Before I took this role, which is new and I am desperately playing catch-up, I ran an



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independent production company for 25 years. In an indie, you are so focused on securing the next commission so that you can offer employment to people. That additional headspace to understand the current complexities of the apprenticeship system just is not there. The extra additional funding is often not there. We can do a hearts and minds piece, too.

Q456 **Julie Elliott:** Who do you suggest pays these extra costs?

**Laura Mansfield:** We need to work together to potentially unlock some of that unused levy. At the moment, a considerable amount of the levy can be used only for the training costs. Some of the money that gets returned to the Exchequer could be unlocked to add flexibility to the system and to encourage greater take-up.

The rate of take-up in the screen sector is 66:1, whereas in building or finance it is something like 27:1. In the broader creative industries, it is something like 210:1. Screen does better than perhaps the broader creative industries, where there is a broader piece of work to do, but we could all go on a big journey to improve the number of apprenticeships for that broad outcome and to improve the diversity of that as an optional pathway. It is only one of many other options.

Q457 **Julie Elliott:** Dominique, from your experience of working with the apprenticeship system, how can it be made better to work for the industry?

**Dominique Unsworth:** Most people who know me and Resource Productions know that we are massive advocates of apprenticeships. That is not to negate anything that has been said around the challenges within our sector, short-term working, contracts, and productions ending. However, our organisation is an SME. We started off with three employees and one apprentice. Our second apprentice is now our head of production. We are not for profit. We do 50% training and 50% production, but we produce content. We have managed to utilise it.

One big challenge is raising awareness of the economic value of apprenticeships and the cost-effectiveness. We have heard a couple of things this morning about how much it costs. Unfortunately, we do not have hiring managers in our sector. One sectoral problem is that the HR mechanisms we use are not fit for purpose. We cannot address both those things at once if we are not able to explain that trainees in our sector for some of the big players get paid around £700 to £800 a week. An apprentice on the apprenticeship wage costs significantly less. If you hire someone on a traineeship to work on a production that may last three to six months, we need to do some work with our sector to explore the cost implications of taking someone on a lower rate, which is a perfectly acceptable apprenticeship wage, and giving them meaningful engagement and work across a production supply chain over 12 months.



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The portable apprentice model is one way to look at that, which we are exploring, as Sara explained. The other is to look at ways of educating, upskilling and using some of the CPD—or lack of CPD—that we have around training HODs and small suppliers within the system to understand how to utilise what is there. The need around ensuring that Ofsted does not restrict some good training providers in this sector is massive.

It is a threefold approach. It is around looking at Ofsted and freeing up the training provision. It is around making sure that people in our sector fully understand the financial benefits to their productions and how they can manage the 12-month process, which the portable apprentice model and so on will help. Then it is around looking at the sector as a whole and the HR issues and improving how we hire.

**Q458 Julie Elliott:** Thank you. Myriam, as a freelancer who has built and is continuing to build your career in the industry, how important is it for you to be paid as you train, and how common is it for you to be paid as you train?

**Myriam Raja:** It is not common to be paid as you train. I guess I am fortunate now with my career because I have done enough to get to a point where I feel secure. But it started a long time ago, when I was 14 and I met Dom at Resource Productions. I went to an after-school film club. From then on, I took on so many schemes and opportunities that were around back then but are not around now. That was before going to university. It was important for me to have those to stay in the industry as I was trying to get a foot in.

After I went to university, Creative England had iShorts and Random Acts was run by Channel 4. Doing those two things helped me make short films. Then I went to NFTS. If those things had not been around, I would not have been able to sustain a career. I do not know if that answers that question.

**Q459 Julie Elliott:** We have been talking about apprenticeships here, which were not in the ether when you started out in this industry. Would they help people get into the industry and train?

**Myriam Raja:** I am probably more representative of people in roles such as director, writer or producer above the line, whereas the apprenticeships work for skills training and other roles, like sound recordists, as Jon was saying, are below the line. If you want people in roles like mine, you need a different, nurturing approach. One of those is short film schemes, where people can make short films, find producers to partner with, make applications and manage budgets. They can afford to fail.

**Q460 Julie Elliott:** Do you get paid while you do those schemes?



**Myriam Raja:** No, you do not get paid but you get a budget to pay a crew and you can hire your friends and people who can train in short films. It is less risky because you are learning to develop your—

Q461 **Julie Elliott:** How do you survive and live if you do not get paid to do that?

**Myriam Raja:** I lived at home. I did not rent. I worked loads part time. I did loads of jobs part time. There is no point in having opportunities if not everyone can afford to have them.

Before directing "Top Boy" I was a mentee on the first season, but for that they paid me, as Dom said, the normal trainee budget. That money went to me commuting into London to go on the shoot. If they had not paid me, I would not have been able to do that.

Q462 **Alex Sobel:** Myriam, I enjoyed "Top Boy." I saw the TV BAFTAs the other week, and it was great that you won best series and Jasmine Jobson won as well. You have already given us quite compelling evidence.

You told us about being able to make the short film. How much preparation did that give you to direct a TV series like "Top Boy" with a big company like Netflix?

**Myriam Raja:** Ending up on "Top Boy" was a culmination of so many things that had to be in place. I feel like I had to work extra hard to get there. Like I said, I had to begin quite young, but if I had not done all those short films before even getting to do NFTS, I would not have had a well-developed visual language, grammar and confidence. I got my agent through being at the NFTS, who then helped me get on to "Top Boy." I had to do a mentee scheme and did one episode and then it was four episodes. Being at the BAFTAs was after six years of working with that production company and getting on to "Top Boy", and before that even longer doing all these other schemes.

Q463 **Alex Sobel:** I grew up in Beaconsfield, so I know NFTS quite well. How are NFTS and "Top Boy" now feeding into the much bigger project of directing a whole feature film? You are now taking up this next phase. How has that experience prepared you for this? What challenges do you face now that you have not experienced before?

**Myriam Raja:** I still feel a lack of security around my career. Now that I am trying to write my own feature and develop it and get it across, there are not many directors like me and I feel like a sole representative and my projects get scrutinised a bit more. If we had other south Asians from various backgrounds, or if they were not just English but Scottish, there would be a variety of projects and people would not feel like they have to manage their careers with as much scrutiny. I should not feel so alone in that sense.

Q464 **Alex Sobel:** In our first session, Gurinder Chadha said that even now she has trouble getting funds for films. She has made many successful



feature films. You are not in her fortunate position. How difficult do you find it to get finance? Are you not quite at that phase yet?

**Myriam Raja:** No. I find it quite difficult. I am writing at the moment, but it is unpaid and I have not worked since last June. I am trying to make my first feature. It should not be like this. I do not know where I would look for a training thing to help me.

Q465 **Alex Sobel:** In other culture industries like music, a band would get an advance to record an album. Could that happen in the film industry?

**Myriam Raja:** You have development money, but it is still not guaranteed that you will be able to make the film afterwards. Because my film is in Urdu and is set in precolonial India, it is harder to get it across.

Q466 **Alex Sobel:** I understand that. Anyway, I will not dominate the session. Dominique, how might small-budget productions that have a training emphasis be incorporated into the BFI skills clusters programme?

**Dominique Unsworth:** Resource Productions leads the Berkshire cluster. It is another southern one. There is always this thing that this is the Shire and it must be lovely and easy to get work there. We operate from Slough, which is the most diverse council outside London, and we propel all our programmes from that heart. Across Berkshire, the sector is growing. We have growing studios. All the majors—Netflix, Disney and Amazon—are coming through.

We have been fortunate to get the BFI support because it has acted as a badge that we can then go out to industry with. Industry has responded exceptionally well. We have been working with the education sector through the University of Reading. We have been working with all our councils through the film office that we run. We have been working with Shinfield Studios, which is brand-new.

Through all those relationships, we have been able to get Amazon on board. Only when you have players like Bray Film Studios and Amazon can you start to integrate training and production effectively because you are there at the start of production and are talking to the unit production managers. You have access to the jobs before they go live and you can start to influence. For me, the clusters are a game changer in our micro-locality, where we are the smallest, because we can start to work closely with those productions to tailor responsive training.

Q467 **Alex Sobel:** Slough is 10 miles from NFTS and 10 miles from Pinewood. Does that make any difference?

**Dominique Unsworth:** Yes, it does, but you would be amazed at how few people in Slough knew where Pinewood was, and practically no one when Myriam started had heard of the NFTS. We have been working with the NFTS over the years to make sure that that happens.



It is also about infrastructure. You have to think about localities not just like Scotland, Ireland and Wales that have their own challenges in those nations, but also places like Berkshire. There is no bus or train to get across from rural west Berkshire at one end to urban Slough at the other. One bus goes from Slough to Beaconsfield. They looked at cancelling it. The service has been reduced and it is impossible. That was crucial for Myriam to get there and for me, as someone who does not drive in the locality, to get there to engage with students and help them get on to productions afterwards.

It is about a bigger picture than having the amazing film school down the road. That is absolutely great, but not if you do not drive and do not have the money to rent in that locality. We need to increase the accessibility for even hyper-local places like Slough, never mind Scotland. It is a big access barrier.

**Q468 Alex Sobel:** I am an MP in Leeds now, but I was a teenager in Beaconsfield. I know exactly the challenges with the bus service going to Slough, High Wycombe or anywhere, basically.

Finally on this question, we heard from Myriam about how useful making short films was. Laura, would a Government policy to stimulate micro-budget film production be an effective tool to develop a skilled workforce nationally?

**Laura Mansfield:** Certainly, having those transition projects at all budget levels helps to develop skills, because skills development is not just formal training. It is on the job. Productions, whether film or television, at different budget levels give ladder opportunities. It will be interesting to see the benefit of the new tax credit for the under-£15 million films. There is a real appetite to see across the Film Skills Council the change that that will make. Those more micro-budget projects under £1.5 million find it quite hard to raise funding but have great opportunities to grow indigenous talent and could be an area of focus.

Skills interventions and training are about those projects being available, but this is also about different schemes and talent progression being offered. Projects such as Film Forward, which the film skills group does, enables people with several years of experience to progress. They are mentored and supported through that. The trainee finder enables trainees to be paid on productions and has so far had 1,400 people go through as paid trainees on sets. For example, "Top Boy" had 10 in series 3. It is about looking at the whole range of initiatives and support across the piece.

**Q469 Alex Sobel:** We went to Paris as a Committee and met CSA. They have a levy on streamers, which stimulates domestic film production right across the piece—short films, feature films and so on. They also have a quota for cinemas. We had the streamers in front of us and—I will paraphrase them—they said that that would produce a lot of rubbish films. What is your view? Would bringing through a streamers' levy to create funding for





production development and paying people right through help to stimulate the pipeline of people from different backgrounds?

**Laura Mansfield:** I go back to the point that Georgia made on the earlier panel. The sector already has quite a lot of money in skills investment. The first step is to join it all up, look at where it is invested, look at where those interventions make a difference and then maybe take further steps. Right now, it is about having strategic alignment and coming together as a sector to look at how we can improve what we do and improve the offer, rather than necessarily adding a further compulsory levy. Companies already invest an awful lot of money, time and resource, but now we can come together and look at allocating it.

Q470 **Alex Sobel:** I will move on to diversity and I will try to be a bit shorter. The BFI said there has been some progress, but the film and TV industry still does not reflect the UK population. We have heard that men dominate most senior roles and are 74.5% of directors and 67.3% of writers. The number of women in senior roles has fallen from 50% in 2018 to 45% now. BME and other under-represented groups have similar figures. What impact has the screen industry's failure to recruit from diverse groups had on the economic health of the sector?

**Laura Mansfield:** The sector's diversity is hugely important. In a way, we do not know the economic impact of the lack of diversity, but we do know that our sector is incredibly successful. Imagine how much more successful we could be if we were more diverse and had more plurality of viewpoints, not just in front of the camera but behind. It is about coming together as an industry and making those efforts.

There are two areas. One is making clear those access points, in order to look at the whole piece of careers strategically, so that we are looking at those pipelines. Are there enough access points to bring people from a diverse range of backgrounds into the industry? Crucially, once they are in, how can we ensure that we retain and develop those skills?

The statistics on the skills funds are pretty good. Some 55% of skills funds beneficiaries are women, 18% are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 12% are disabled, but we can all do better.

Sara mentioned right at the end of her evidence inclusive recruitment habits—looking at how we educate not just our leaders and our hirers, looking at how we improve hiring, promoting, interviewing and advertising, and moving away, if we can, from some of the informal hiring practices.

That is about sharing best practice. Some popular e-learning right across the piece offers insight into better working habits that support companies and freelancers to learn about structuring an interview and all those different things. Some 250,000 people have done e-learning through ScreenSkills since we started, which is a considerable amount, and





27,000 dud it last year. It is about us all working together to keep on doing better and spreading those practices right across the industry.

Q471 **Alex Sobel:** When you came to this as a teenager, Myriam, what was your view of the industry? What was your family's view? Did they think it was a viable career for you or did you have to persuade people that you should go into TV?

**Myriam Raja:** Yes, definitely, my parents were not up for it. My background is that my mum is a cleaner. I was on free school meals. She brought my brother and me up. We moved to Slough from Bradford. English is not my first language.

I never even considered that I could afford to dream about this. It was only through meeting Dom and going to this after-school film club and then being given £100 to make a horror film—I showed it to my mum.

Yes, the challenge began earlier because I could not point to anyone and say, "This is what this career could look like." It was so unknown. It was important for me to do it consistently so that I could then pick the right GCSEs and ask to go to university to study this. It had to be a viable idea in my mother's head before then.

Q472 **Alex Sobel:** I am trying to tease out what is important. After-school clubs and programmes are important. Are role models important? Are you a role model now?

**Myriam Raja:** Yes, I hope so. I went back to my school and spoke. It is also important to say that I went to a girls' school which was predominantly Muslim and Asian. It was important that I went to an after-school club. That is where I met boys to direct and talk to. The industry is majorly male-dominated, but those skills that would have been lost came from going to an after-school film club. There were also little things like Dom meeting my mum so she knew where I was heading and Dom being like, "I can pay for a taxi for you to get home. It's fine."

It has to begin at school. So many kids like me would not even have thought that they can think about this. Yes, it has to begin there. It has to be nurturing.

Q473 **Alex Sobel:** Dominique, you are a role model yourself in this regard, and I am sure you have helped many other people, as well as Myriam. We have had a lot of setbacks in the industry globally. We had the strikes. We had covid. It is a precarious profession. It is a precarious industry because you have to freelance and fund yourself between projects. In that context, how can the industry persuade more people from Myriam's background, people without financial safety nets, people without backgrounds in the creative industries, that they can have a career in it?

**Dominique Unsworth:** In addition to what Myriam said, it is important to be able to work or model the working behaviour of being self-employed, managing a production, working on a production, doing short-



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term work and having the multiskilling ability to then go and work in a café or bakery in those periods. That will evidence to your family and your local community that you can be part of an amazing, creative thing while earning other money elsewhere and having what everyone calls a portfolio career.

Most of us, me included, continue to do that within this industry, and that is what most people will always do within the creative industries. We are blessed to be in a film and TV element that has benefited from massive inward investment from some amazing American production companies.

We have somewhat lost our way. Myriam went through and that I went through programmes as young people that enabled us to make low-budget short films and to learn those multiple skills, build the networks and create our own infrastructure. Myriam was able to produce probably six or seven short films that were publicly funded. The skills and the networks and the evidencing to the community, in terms of learning how to be a freelancer, happen only through managing money, making a project and fundraising for the next, which we do not have out there in the ecosystem at the moment.

For me, the single most useful thing is to look at where those programmes went. We have not seen them for the last 10 years. We lost the First Light programme, which was integrated into Into Film, which does amazing things, but it does not do what First Light did, which was give kids money to make films. We also had the amazing iShorts and iFeatures and the Film London Microwave. Laura talked about the £1.5 million bracket. We made our first feature film as an independent last year, which came in at about £1.5 million, with lots of favours thrown in. The key contributor to that was the Rothschild Foundation. That is the state of financing for low-budget films in this country. We rely on independent wealth and trusts to give donations. We do not have that pathway, because it has been eroded from short films up to low-budget. That is where the work is done. That is where you learn to work.

Q474 **Chair:** Dom, can I stay with you? We have heard a lot about the success you have had in attracting young people from hitherto under-represented backgrounds into your programmes and into your work. Do you have any tips you can give us that could be replicated across the sector and across the country that you have had success with?

**Dominique Unsworth:** Yes. I hope that, through the cluster, we are modelling something that we can share more formally when we do our first report. Our model is quite clear. We have been doing it for 25 years, since I set it up in 1999, and we know it works because we can see the outputs. We have worked with all the partners you are hearing from today, with a hyper-local focus, understanding the community, being embedded within the locality, and with the organisation having the autonomy and power to look around and have staff and freelancers who live in that community next to high levels of production. You need those two components anywhere in the country.



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The models we have consist of four parts. The first is youth engagement, which is where we started—with youth clubs and film clubs, making films with kids and crossing over into digital media and associated things. We run YES, Youth Engagement Slough, which does everything from sport to film. We can find those kids who do not know anything about film, drag them out of the canoe and say, “You are going to make a film today.” Youth engagement is key for us.

Parallel to that is the retention, the reskilling and the returners to work. We have the Creative Collective, which engages people who think they might have a creative bone in their body but do not know where to apply it. They may be in their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s. They come in as adults. We now do the same with them as we do with the young people.

Both of those feed into the training work we do through the skills cluster. We work with partners like ScreenSkills, Creative England and the Film and TV Charity, and we try to signpost and collaborate with existing provision—not to create anything new. We also utilise amazing Government programmes like the apprenticeship programme, which has standards and training we can use, like the bootcamps funded by the DFE, which are game changers for retention, and like the DWP’s SWAP programme, which enables us to reach the hardest to reach long-term unemployed. All those signpost into the existing provision that the larger providers work and help people access them so that there is an equal playing field.

The last thing is to make sure that you are integrated through things like the local skills investment plan, formerly the local enterprise partnerships, and the business growth hubs, to enable people to develop in terms of their local area, the economy and the businesses that operate there, and getting all the local employers, whether it is Amazon or MBS Lighting, engaged in hiring everything that you have just trained up. If you do not have the productions there and you do not have the supply chain there, you are training people and then sending them way out of your locality. You need to build that ecosystem. Similarly, you can build an extremely successful studio and the kid at the end of the road will never work there. It is about bringing all the parties together.

The key for us has been running a film office. We set up Berkshire Film Office because no one else was managing all six unitary authorities in our area. Productions would come in and would not know where to go. That unlocked for us that relationship with industry because, suddenly, we had the power, the councils had the power and the Government had the power to say, “Here are the requirements for you to film in this locality.” Then training can be embedded into that ask.

Q475 **Chair:** That was a really thorough answer. Thank you. Laura, how do you signpost people? Dom talked about the kid at the end of the road who does not necessarily know what the opportunities are. How do you signpost people? The reason I ask is that I went on your website and one



page says, "Look for vacancies." When you click on it, there is nothing there—it is just a blank page. Are there plans to address that? Are there plans to better signpost people into the opportunities in the industry.

**Laura Mansfield:** Absolutely. Since I joined in January, the goal is to make sure that we provide that pathway and that direction. Across all the activity of ScreenSkills last year, we supported 27,000 people, and 127,000 people so far have engaged with traineeships, with mentorships and with support through work. Part of the goal is to make sure that there is a unified pathway and to work with Dominique and to work across the landscape. At the moment, we have quite fragmented provision right across the UK. We need to provide not only a strategy but clear pathways towards training opportunities and job opportunities, and to align what happens where and when in the UK. I cannot speak to that particular area of the website, but I can certainly look at that.

Q476 **Chair:** You say a lot that you are going to "have a look at" things. When Alex asked you about the levy, you said, "We don't need more money. We need to come together and look at how the money could be better spent." It does not sound like you are gripping it. Who should grip this? Rather than "looking at" it, who should say, "We will do this. We will bring together this group of people. These are the timescales. This is when we want to have recommendations on the table"? Is that your job? Or is that someone else's job?

**Laura Mansfield:** We absolutely are gripping it. We are gripping it in collaboration with the task force. As I said, I joined the organisation in January. We are in the process of engaging with the task force, with all the different councils and working groups in the skills investment funds, together with the clusters and with the BFI. This work is ongoing.

Part of the piece about taking it forward is working in partnership. It is all very well for me to arrive and say, "Ta-da, I have my own personal vision," but the point of this is to go on a journey together with other people. Specifically to John's point earlier on, it is not about one person in London mandating something. It is about going on a joined-up journey. We are embarking on making some changes to our own organisation, which will enable us to better be that strategic body and better collaborate, even more than we already are, with industry and with partners right across the piece, and we have also committed to releasing a strategy later in the year—at the end of September. This work is ongoing.

Since I started, I have been to all four nations. I have met 120 different people. I am keen to make sure that I hear from producers, agencies, streamers and indies right across the genres to understand how we can put this together to better pull together the picture. So work is very much ongoing.

Q477 **Chair:** At the end of September, we will have a strategy. You have talked a lot about a journey, but a journey needs an end point.



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**Laura Mansfield:** It does. We will have a strategy for how ScreenSkills will be able to speak to the broader needs of the industry and be the organisation that can put together a pan-industry strategy that is accessible for end users and for people to get into.

Q478 **Chair:** That sounds like a lot of words. What does that actually mean? By September, will there be a clear strategy that has goals, targets and numbers, or a strategy that signposts to more coming together and looking?

**Laura Mansfield:** It will be a strategy for how ScreenSkills will put together that next strategy together with the industry.

Q479 **Chair:** So it will be a strategy for another strategy?

**Laura Mansfield:** It will be part of that.

**Chair:** Part of what? By September, you will publish a strategy that will look at another strategy?

**Laura Mansfield:** By September, we will put together a strategy for how ScreenSkills will be able to be that pan-strategic body and make the evolutions that the task force has suggested and, therefore, be able to work right across the piece to pull that together.

Q480 **Chair:** Will it have clear objectives?

**Laura Mansfield:** Yes.

Q481 **Chair:** Will there be numbers that we can look at and say, "This is what ScreenSkills wants to achieve and this is how we will measure their success"?

**Laura Mansfield:** Yes.

Q482 **Chair:** Good. Thank you. Before we let you go, is there anything else that we should have asked you or that you wanted to say that you think we should take to heart when we compile our recommendations?

**Dominique Unsworth:** I have a quick one. I flagged the Random Acts and BCC New Creatives schemes. It is worth noting that they were funded by the Arts Council. The BFI does amazing things, but it is not able to enable people to make lots of films because it is not funded to do so. It is worth looking at the Arts Council model. As a national portfolio organisation, we develop, inadvertently, filmmakers using Arts Council funding and programmes like Random Acts. Some conversation needs to happen there about what being creative freelancer means. That does not work in the silo of the BFI and the Arts Council.

Q483 **Chair:** Should a compulsory levy go into grassroots film production?

**Dominique Unsworth:** I don't think there should be a compulsory levy. As everyone has said, there is lots of money in the system. That is not our problem. You will never hear me say I do not want more money, but



on this occasion it is about communication, structure, working together and a clearer targeted approach. We need that, not necessarily a compulsory scheme of any kind that will further alienate any of the players that need to get together.

Q484 **Chair:** Who does that work? Who brings them together? We have heard a lot of people say that there is a lot of money in the system and that we need to look at how we bring it together. Who looks at it? Who makes those recommendations?

**Dominique Unsworth:** I hark back to the old days. I am old enough to remember the UK Film Council, and that is what that body did. ScreenSkills took up the mantle of some of that work and did an excellent job for many years. It has been challenging over the last few years, which is why we now have Laura and a new vision. I hope that that body will be ScreenSkills, but it needs to be external to all of us bidding, all of us competing and all of us duplicating. It needs to be neutral and to not deliver at the same time as co-ordinating.

Q485 **Chair:** That was helpful. Myriam, is there anything else we should have asked you but did not? Is there anything else you want to say?

**Myriam Raja:** I am not sure. We just need more Doms and more resources. It makes a difference, especially when you want to be a storyteller, a writer or a director. When people make those works, they will employ other people of diverse backgrounds anyway. That will trickle down, but we need that change up top.

Q486 **Chair:** Laura, I feel like I have put you on the spot quite a lot. Do you want to add anything else?

**Laura Mansfield:** That is okay. It is always fun being the new girl. I just want to say that, for us as an industry, pulling together that data is massively important. Sometimes data is not sexy and is not the poster child, and it is not necessarily always that easy to raise money against, but that consistent data is what will help inform us and help us continue to get through the piece.

**Chair:** Thank you all for coming in today. I invite our final panel forward. Thank you very much.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Philippa Childs and Marcus Ryder.

**Chair:** Thank you very much to our final panel joining us today. We have Philippa Childs, who is the head of Bectu, and Marcus Ryder MBE, the chief executive of the Film and TV Charity. You are both very welcome. I will start the questioning with John, please.

Q487 **John Nicolson:** I was gearing up and ready to go. Marcus, I will start by asking you about people leaving the industry, because that is a concern, isn't it? Is there a profile of people who are leaving the industry? Who is





going, and what can we do to keep them?

**Marcus Ryder:** The short answer is that everybody is going.

**John Nicolson:** Everybody is going. Cheer us up, why don't you?

**Marcus Ryder:** It is cutting across the industry. While we have been talking here, ITV has announced that it is making £50 million in savings, and it is thought that that will equate to about 200 jobs. This is on top of the recruitment freeze it had before. This is on top of Channel 4's announcement of about 200 redundancies. There are redundancies across Amazon Prime. There are redundancies across BBC. So there are redundancies across the board.

Looking at freelancers, there are not redundancies. Those are people who are out of work. There has been some brilliant work by Bectu, looking at the number of freelancers who are currently out of work. Research we have done as the Film and TV Charity has shown that this is disproportionately hitting women and people with caring responsibilities. It also disproportionately hitting black and global majority people. I could go further about the mental health effects on people as well, which again disproportionately hits people with protected characteristics.

Q488 **John Nicolson:** Ms Childs, could I pick that up with you? When I talk to people about this, they tell me they are just scunnered with poor working conditions. Their work-life balance is bad as well, and the uncertainty is the curse. Like my colleague, I have been a freelancer as well. You do not know what the long term is, which has consequences for accommodation, mortgages and so on. People get tired of this. Is that the fundamental problem?

**Philippa Childs:** I think it is a fundamental problem. Inevitably, it is tough when there is lots of work, but when there is not any work around, people struggle financially. They are isolated in their homes and they do not know where the next job is coming from. All those things that are challenging in the industry—long hours, culture, bullying and harassment, problems with diversity and inclusion—come into sharper focus.

Yes, as Marcus said, our research, which I shared with everyone on this Committee, showed that in February seven out of 10 of our members were not working. I am not wishing to be too depressing because, yes, this industry is fantastic and very vibrant to work in, and when things are good, they are really good. But it would be remiss of me not to say that, at the moment, things are incredibly challenging.

Q489 **John Nicolson:** Seven out of 10 is a very high figure. Do any specific factors at the moment explain that high figure?

**Philippa Childs:** It is a combination of things. Post the strikes in the US, we all anticipated that things would get back to normal quickly. That did not happen. The challenges for broadcasters with their income models have caused problems. The advertising downturn is incredibly difficult. A





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combination of things right now—the cost of production, inflation and all those things—have caused a perfect storm. The industry goes through different times in terms of the amount of work around, but everyone in the industry recognises that this as a particularly challenging time right now.

Q490 **John Nicolson:** Yet some people in the industry do phenomenally well. It is a very unequal industry, isn't it? In my experience of television and on this Committee, we have had the publication of presenters' salaries, which showed a huge gulf, with some people being paid surprisingly enormous salaries for the talent levels. There is a big gender pay gap and a shortage of BAME people at the top levels. Some people do eye-wateringly well, and some people do really badly.

**Philippa Childs:** That is a fact, yes. From my perspective, I would like to see measures that rebalance that dynamic.

Q491 **John Nicolson:** How? Tell me.

**Philippa Childs:** The industry could come together and look at how it better supports its freelance workforce consistently, not just when we are in the boom times like 2022 but—

**John Nicolson:** Give us some examples of how you would do that.

**Philippa Childs:** The industry could set up a fund to support people through times when they are not able to work. At the moment, thankfully, we have the Film and TV Charity, which has doled out millions of pounds in crisis loans to freelancers who literally cannot pay their bills. Given the economic importance of this industry to the UK economy, how can it be right that the workforce have to rely on charity?

Q492 **John Nicolson:** How would you make that work? If seven out of 10 people are not working, you would need a huge fund to provide those people with the support you talk about.

**Philippa Childs:** From my perspective, it is about the whole industry coming together. As you said, it is a very unequal industry, so there is money around. People could contribute to a fund, and the industry more broadly could contribute to a fund, that could support people in tough times. We have heard that lots of money goes into skills and training, but it is a waste of money if people just leave at the other end. So the industry needs to be a bit more imaginative about how it supports its workforce.

Q493 **John Nicolson:** You mentioned bullying a second ago. This Committee has taken an interest in that in the past. How do you characterise the bullying that you see in the industry? How does it manifest itself, and what can be done about it?

**Philippa Childs:** It is a huge problem—I think everyone recognises that it is a problem across the industry. Some good work and collaboration—



again, that word—has happened across the industry to try to come up with ways to address that problem.

Q494 **John Nicolson:** Who is getting bullied and by whom?

**Philippa Childs:** Probably our members are getting bullied, and they are getting bullied by people who are more senior and have more power in the industry than them.

Q495 **John Nicolson:** Is it worse in your industry than it is in ours—politics—or in journalism? How do you compare it with other aspects of national life?

**Philippa Childs:** It probably is worse as a result of the huge power dynamics in our industry. Some people are incredibly powerful. The project basis of our industry means that there is a lot of pressure on a particular project, and people then move on somewhere else. So I think we all accept that this is a quite pressured environment. But this is a particular problem across the creative industries, which is why we have been involved in, and certainly welcome, the creation of the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority.

**Chair:** We will come back to talk about—

**Marcus Ryder:** Can I come in on bullying?

Q496 **John Nicolson:** Mr Ryder, before I go back to the Chair, we are sitting here and writing a report—that is the purpose of this. It is always good to get recommendations so that we move beyond the nebulous to the specific. We sit down and we write a report, based on what you guys tell us when you come before us, with recommendations for the Government to pick up on. What would you like us to include in our report that would address some of these issues in a practical way? What are some specific bullet points that we could include that would be helpful to address the concerns that you raise?

**Marcus Ryder:** First, you asked how prevalent bullying is. We do a looking-glass survey that looks at the mental health of people across the film and television industry—

**Chair:** Sorry to interrupt you. We will come on to questions about mental health and bullying in a minute. You may want to keep your powder dry on the specifics.

**John Nicolson:** Yes, hold fire on the specifics, but give us recommendations for bullet points for us to include.

**Marcus Ryder:** We need to look not just at the people falling into the river and pulling them out, but at why they fall in in the first place. We need to go upstream to address the issues of why people leave the industry and why the industry is not mentally healthy. The mental health, bullying and other things associated with that are primary reasons why people leave the industry, as well as the financial problems.



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One bullet point I would mention is that the charity has a thing called the whole picture toolkit, which is used by over 90 production companies. At least 200 productions use it. It is mandated by STV on all their productions. It tries to make sure that productions are as mentally healthy as possible. I would like that whole picture toolkit and the mentally healthy framework we are developing to be adopted universally, pan-industry to make sure that every production uses it and every production, at its inception, thinks about the mental health of its workforce.

Q497 **Chair:** Quickly, before we move on to Simon, who we have not heard from yet, one recommendation we made when we did our recent report on creative remuneration was to have a commissioner responsible for freelancers, in the same way that, in government, we have a Children's Commissioner and Victims' Commissioner. Philippa is nodding at me encouragingly, so I hope you will take this as a positive. What were your thoughts on that recommendation?

**Philippa Childs:** Yes, we welcomed that recommendation because someone needs to advocate on behalf of the freelance workforce and raise the challenges and problems of being a freelancer in the industry. We absolutely welcome that.

**Marcus Ryder:** The charity is here for everybody who works in film, television and cinema, but we disproportionately work with freelancers. Those are the people who are definitely at the sharp end. Anything that surfaces their concerns more and makes sure their concerns are championed must be a good thing.

Q498 **Simon Jupp:** Good afternoon. We know that long hours are prevalent in the industry, which makes it difficult for people with caring responsibilities and things like that. Marcus, how can the industry, which is based around those timescales and those shift patterns, support workers better? Do the Government have a role in this?

**Marcus Ryder:** We do not have to accept that production has to have long hours. There are points in the production where there may have long hours, and there have to be when you are trying to catch daylight and what have you. However, the idea that we should just roll over and accept that we have to work long hours does not stand up to close scrutiny.

I know that from personal experience, and I also know that from the data. If we look at the data, freelancers work, on average, 50-plus hours a week. Non-freelancers—staff doing the same jobs—work closer to 43 hours a week. That is why I welcome the idea of somebody championing freelancers so that they are not exploited, to make sure they work the same hours.

**Simon Jupp:** Some may want to do those extra hours, though.



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**Marcus Ryder:** Some may want to, but that is a choice. If it is a choice, it is fine. I worked at the BBC for 24 years in current affairs and documentaries in London. They worked far longer hours than when I worked in current affairs in BBC Scotland. When I first went up there, I was used to the long-hour culture and I thought it was necessary to make award-winning programmes. I went up to Scotland and found that I was able to make more award-winning programmes working shorter hours with better management.

**John Nicolson:** Hear, hear!

**Marcus Ryder:** Sometimes we accept a culture without questioning if it is absolutely necessary. That is my own personal experience, but the data shows that.

Q499 **Simon Jupp:** It is a good point. It depends on resources as well. I worked on a breakfast show in local radio for the BBC. We had half the staff of the nearby neighbouring breakfast show, so I had to work longer hours as a result, despite asking for more resources. But that is not the point here. Do the Government have a role in making sure that people are not taken advantage of in that way?

**Marcus Ryder:** In regard to working hours? I would have thought so. I have not given it that much thought, if I am being completely honest. On working hours, again, I would defer to Bectu, who have done a specific paper, which we supported, on working-hour practices.

Q500 **Simon Jupp:** I have the same question for you, Philippa. Can the Government play a role here?

**Philippa Childs:** Definitely, it is a challenge for the industry. I agree with Marcus that working long hours is a cultural thing. It is not actually necessary. In Scotland, we did this really good piece of work with the BBC and others about how a production could operate on much shorter working hours. The next stage is to do that on a production and see whether it is costlier or, in fact, more efficient because people are not quite so tired and stressed.

Do the Government have a role to play? Definitely, the Government have a role to play in making sure that good work happens across all sectors. Sometimes our sector or our industry thinks that it has a pass on some of those things, quite frankly, and that because of the cost of production and all those things, they can push people to work harder, longer and in more stressful conditions.

Yes, all the things that happen in other industries could happen in our industry. Job sharing could happen in our industry much more. Shorter working hours could happen in our industry much more.

**Marcus Ryder:** Now that I have had a chance to think about it, possibly we need to think about Ofcom's role in this. Ofcom collects data on diversity and it publishes that data. It is incredibly useful to see how



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things are progressing with the different broadcasters. Ofcom may be able to play a role in collecting data on working hours if the broadcasters—certain news productions, for example—were asked to do that. I am not sure about the Government, but Ofcom might have a role.

**Q501 Simon Jupp:** Good point. One concern—I am playing devil’s advocate here—is that reducing working hours and lengthening schedules could impose extra costs on production. That makes us, as a country, perhaps less competitive with others. What are your concerns around that?

**Marcus Ryder:** From my experience of working in documentaries and current affairs in BBC London and working in documentaries and current affairs in BBC Scotland, I made the same award-winning programmes, winning BAFTAs and—

**Q502 Simon Jupp:** I guess the BBC is slightly different because of how it is funded, but the commercial sector could have a problem here.

**Marcus Ryder:** The beauty of being able to compare one BBC department with another BBC department is that I am comparing like with like. I was working with a smaller budget in BBC Scotland, but we were able to reduce our working hours and still make award-winning programmes.

**Q503 Simon Jupp:** You were somewhat shielded from commercial activity, being in the BBC.

**Marcus Ryder:** Absolutely, but if you are trying to compare like with like, that is a good one to look at. I would say that Bectu’s work is really important. The next step is to roll it out and test the hypothesis to see whether this does have a negative impact.

**Q504 Simon Jupp:** Could it put off inward investment and put investors off shooting in the UK if, for example, we reduced working hours and those sorts of things?

**Philippa Childs:** No. I am convinced that by working smarter, the industry could still produce great films and TV dramas, but treat people slightly better through the process. As was mentioned earlier, the skills of the crew in the UK attracts that inward investment, as well as our fantastic studio space and all those things. Working smarter, planning better and all those things could still happen on shorter hours.

**Q505 Simon Jupp:** Moving on to mental health—I do not want to talk about bullying, because my colleague Damian will speak about it in a moment—your evidence to this Committee, Marcus, outlines a mental health crisis in the industry. What is behind that? What changes to working practices are required to help alleviate this? How quickly would you like that to be implemented?

**Marcus Ryder:** Several things are behind it. We are talking about working hours for one. We are talking about bullying, which we will go on to. We are talking about highly pressured environments. We are talking



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about a culture that sometimes does not recognise mental health problems. The stats are stark. In our survey, 77% of respondents did not think that the film and TV industry has a healthy working environment.

The good news—I realise that I am talking a lot of bad news—is that the feedback we have had from people using the whole picture toolkit is absolutely positive. It has a direct result in people having a better mental health environment to work in, which is why it is fantastic that so many productions have taken it on. Our mental health taskforce involves all the major broadcasters and many of the streamers. STV, to take one example, is mandating the mental health toolkit, which shows that many people are taking this seriously. It would literally have an effect tomorrow if a production took on board and thought about mental health from its inception.

**Simon Jupp:** Would you like to add anything, Philippa?

**Philippa Childs:** Everything that we have talked about contributes to the mental health crisis. People working long hours is potentially harmful to physical health and mental health. Bullying and harassment contribute to that. Yes, this is a particular problem for the industry. Our research shows that mental health challenges increase at times like now, when people do not have work and do not know where their next work will come from. They are isolated and they are worried about their financial futures.

Q506 **Damian Green:** I am struck that we have had evidence session after evidence session where people say, “We are good at this industry.” It is one of our best industries internationally. The Government recognise that as well. Even more surprisingly, it is awash with money and is spending that money more effectively to attract more people in. Loads of young people want to get into it, and people want to take mid-career breaks to get into it. We heard this morning that you can be an accountant in an insurance company and decide that it might be more fun to be an accountant in a film company. Why would you not do that?

So there is this tremendous demand to get into the industry. Yet, from what you are saying, freelancers spend a lot of their time unemployed. Staff jobs are going at all major broadcasters. If you do manage to get a job, you will get bullied and have mental health problems. There is cognitive dissonance here. Which is true? Is this an attractive industry or not?

**Marcus Ryder:** The acid test that I apply is to ask people whether they would recommend their children going into the industry. Over the last seven to eight months, I have yet to get a positive response, with somebody saying, “Yes, I would encourage my child to go into the industry.” The response is normally, “It is a creative industry, so I would encourage them exactly the same way I would if they were an artist or a musician. They want to express their creativity.” But no one I have





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spoken to has recommended that their children should go into the film and television industry as a profession.

**Q507 Damian Green:** You say that has happened in the last seven to eight months. Traditionally, you would absolutely have encouraged your children to go into that industry.

**Marcus Ryder:** The reason I say seven to eight months is that I have been CEO for seven to eight months. I did not ask that question previously.

**Q508 Damian Green:** You must have considered that question previously. Is this an industry you would recommend young people to go into? We have heard from youngish people who, when they were younger, were desperate to get into it.

**Marcus Ryder:** Young people are still desperate to get into it because it is a really interesting industry. At the same time, coming from the background that I come from, not having the bank of mum and dad, I would not be able to sustain at least the early part of my career, meaning the first 10 years, if I entered the industry now.

**Philippa Childs:** We surveyed people back in September at the height of the strikes, and 24% said they were considering leaving, or planning to leave, the industry within the next five years. In February that figure had risen to 37%. There is a real challenge with turnover, people getting burned out and the precarious nature of the industry, specifically if you are black, if you are a woman or if you come from a lower socioeconomic background. During these periods when you literally cannot financially sustain yourself, you will look elsewhere and you will think that there is a better life for you outside the industry. That is a huge challenge. Yes, I agree that it is an exciting industry, and it should be a rewarding industry. People should be able to be productive in this industry without facing all the challenges we have talked about.

**Q509 Damian Green:** Is it more precarious now than it was 10 years ago?

**Philippa Childs:** I think it is, yes. It probably is. It is an industry that goes through phases. There can be lots of work out there—2022 was a particular boom year. But at the moment, it is incredibly difficult for the workforce.

**Marcus Ryder:** I will give you one anecdote. At the charity, we give out hardship grants. On average, we give out roughly £300,000 in total a year in hardship grants. Last year, we gave out £1 million. Part of that was due to the actors' strike, but our year-on-year new normal, if you look month on month, is now double what it was previously. That indicates how much more people are suffering or how much more precarious people's finances are. It is evidence that we are definitely living in different circumstances than we were a few years ago.

**Q510 Damian Green:** I got the general impression that there are, of course,



huge peaks and troughs, but there are peaks and troughs with a rising trend—there is more activity and, therefore, more work. Is that the case?

**Marcus Ryder:** Only yesterday, Philippa and I were at an industry discussion about whether this is cyclical or structural. Most people thought that the downturn has a structural element and that it is not purely cyclical. They do think that something has happened structurally.

Q511 **Damian Green:** What has happened structurally?

**Marcus Ryder:** Advertising revenue has left and gone to other platforms. ITV and Channel 4 do not have the same finances they had. In what was a boom, the streamers had tried to get as many subscribers as possible and threw money at that. They are now reassessing those streaming models and are contracting and consolidating. There is a possible financial reckoning and restructuring of the financial models for the broadcasters—for the PSBs—and for the international streamers.

Q512 **Damian Green:** I get the point about the streamers. I think everyone expects that there will not be as many in five years' time as there are now, though much more production is going on than there was 10 years ago, simply because the streamers did not exist 10 years ago. Even when they consolidate, there will probably be more.

I get the point about linear advertising going down, but presumably companies still have products to advertise. They will advertise them in different media and in different ways. Those jobs, in some form, ought to be still there.

**Marcus Ryder:** They will advertise them on different mediums, but maybe not on different media. You only have to talk to newspapers. Their advertising model has completely changed. They talk about having to have internet pennies versus print pounds. Print journalism is definitely suffering, and has been for the last 20 years, with regards to the change in how advertising works. It does not come as a massive shock to see that the jobs do not necessarily follow where the advertising goes.

Q513 **Damian Green:** I suppose we can look at some facts. Does Bectu have more members now than it did five years ago?

**Philippa Childs:** Yes.

Q514 **Damian Green:** Do you expect to have more members in five years' time than you have now?

**Philippa Childs:** I am not sure, actually. At the moment, we are facing a bit of a reset more generally. There are bigger challenges for broadcasters and studios. Where investment will go remains to be seen. Of course, I hope to have more members in five years' time because of the work we do, but I am not sure whether we will see the continued increase in investment.

Q515 **Damian Green:** I have a last specific question on bullying. We have seen all the figures. Is it worse than in other industries? Is the data collected



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in the same way in other industries?

**Marcus Ryder:** I am not sure. I know that our stats say that 33% of people working in film and television have experienced bullying in the last year alone leading up to that survey. I do not know what bullying is like in other industries—I do not work in other industries—but I could look at that and feed back to you.

**Damian Green:** It is a genuine question because I am not conscious that other industries collect this data. I may be ignorant about that, but it would be interesting to know that. Thank you.

Q516 **Chair:** I want to quickly go back to the bullying and harassment issue. Philippa mentioned CIISA earlier. Do you get the sense that the industry is buying into CIISA and is genuinely behind it?

**Philippa Childs:** I certainly hope that they are. The noises that I have heard and the conversations that I have had suggest that the industry is getting behind it. The proof will be in the pudding. When people are asked to cough up money to make CIISA happen, we will see whether it is a real and lasting commitment or whether it is just warm words. A lot of development work is still to be done around how CIISA will operate in practice, but I certainly see it as part of the infrastructure to try to address this problem in the industry.

Q517 **Chair:** Some companies have articulated to us that they feel they do not need to work in partnership with an independent body like CIISA because they have their own systems to tackle bullying and harassment. How do you respond to that?

**Philippa Childs:** Certainly, the people we represent as freelancers do not feel that those systems are robust enough or that they have dealt with the problems that we have seen across the industry. I certainly take the view that an independent body is likely to gain more confidence. Our members have told us that. They tell us that they see a need for an independent look at this problem and for people not to mark their own homework.

Q518 **Chair:** For an industry that employs so many freelancers, you want something that can straddle a whole range of different companies independently?

**Philippa Childs:** Yes.

Q519 **Chair:** Good. Thank you so much for your time and your patience with us today. I have the same question as we concluded the panel before with: is there anything else we should have asked you, or are there any other points you wanted to make that will be meaningful in supporting the report that we come up with?

**Philippa Childs:** I wanted to talk about tax incentives and the challenge around diversity and inclusion in the industry. It has been suggested before that those incentives should be linked to ensuring diversity and



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abiding by the standards that the industry has set in terms of what a diverse production should look like.

Q520 **Chair:** Would you use the tax relief system to boost recruitment of people from a range of different backgrounds?

**Philippa Childs:** Definitely. Money talks. There have been lots of warm words about diversity and inclusion, but we see at a time like now, when things are challenging, that all those good intentions go out the window.

**Marcus Ryder:** I second the idea of using tax incentives to incentivise best practice, definitely with regards to diversity and inclusion, but also with regards to good mental health practices. It is fantastic that so many productions have taken on board our whole picture mental health toolkit and are looking at a mental health framework to address these issues, but it would be fantastic if there was a way to incentivise that.

Diversity is a massive issue. Baroness Floella Benjamin talked about making sure that the current crisis does not disproportionately hit women, people of colour, disabled people, people from other protected characteristics and so on. There is a real fear among people I speak to from those protected characteristics that they will disproportionately feel the brunt of it.

Two high-profile executives—one in a streamer, one in a public service broadcaster—have recently lost their jobs due to restructures. Hopefully, that is a restructure and does not mean any diminishing in the commitment of the broadcaster or the streamer in question to the idea of diversity and inclusion. But it is a worrying sign when, in roughly a month, just as they are also making savings, some of these important roles seem to be being lost.

**Chair:** Thank you both so much for appearing in front of us today.