

## Written evidence submitted by ScreenSkills

### About ScreenSkills

ScreenSkills is the industry-led skills body for the screen industries. We work across the UK to ensure that film, television (including children's, unscripted and high-end), VFX (visual effects), animation and games have the skills and talent they need.

We provide insight, career development and other opportunities to help grow and sustain the skilled and inclusive workforce which is the foundation stone of the UK's global screen success.

### Our work includes

- Identifying skills gaps and skills shortages – current and future – across the screen industries and the whole of the country to provide an evidence base for investment in skills and training
- Providing careers information
- Mapping and quality-marking professional pathways to improve entry-level diversity and work readiness
- Supporting development at every stage of a professional career in screen including through skills training (CPD) mentoring and offering bursaries.

### How we are providing support during the current Covid-19 crisis

Screen workers, including freelancers, can access our free online courses (both live and on-demand recordings and modules) which include masterclasses from industry professionals, industry expert learning sessions, small group skills training, maintaining good mental health and guidance on how to access government funding support (with regular updates as the guidance changed) and charity schemes. We also offer workers the chance to email lawyers and HR professional for more detailed guidance.

### Answers to the question

#### **What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?**

The ONS statistics for the UK film and TV sector indicate that in 2019 a total of just over 166,000 people were employed across the production, distribution, exhibition and broadcasting sectors. The total screen workforce is approx. 211,000.

A recent BFI study estimates that self-employed workers in the film and TV sectors account for 32% of this workforce, nearly double that of the UK working population as a whole (15%). This percentage further splits into PAYE freelancers (37%), sole trader/Schedule D freelancers (27%) and those who operate as one person companies (36%).

Recent ScreenSkills research shows that the impact has been 88% of those freelancers being negatively affected by the filming hiatus caused by the lockdown. This percentage splits between 66%, who have been strongly negatively affected and a 22%, who have been negatively affected. Just under 5% of the sample has not been affected at all, and 7% of respondents do not know yet. A very small percentage of the sample, equal to 2%, has experienced a positive impact.

Just under 70% of the sample has identified financial and/or legal advice as their main priority, suggesting the need to better understand how to navigate the welfare system as well as the new funding schemes that have been recently put in place by government, local councils, lenders and industry bodies. This finding is also in line with the large number of respondents that added additional comments in the open-text box of the survey, where a substantial majority expressed major concerns about their finances, how to make ends meet and what the future holds.

## **How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?**

There was widespread support for the Employee Retention Scheme when it was announced but also deep concern that freelancers were effectively excluded. The Government responded but there are still strong concerns, well-articulated by Bectu, about changing guidance from HMRC which may negatively impact PAYE freelancers who cannot be re-engaged and furloughed once their contract has naturally come to an end, even if they were on a contract during the relevant dates of the scheme. The guidance has since changed again which the freelance community will welcome.

Overall, there is clearly a challenge for Treasury / HMRC in particular to provide support for the freelance community which, given the high percentage of them in the screen industries is a major problem.

## **What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?**

### Time scales

It will take time for the industry to get back on its feet, with multiple challenges, some of which existed before the Covid-19 crisis, some of which have been exacerbated by it and some of which are new.

Covid-19 has caused an almost complete global shutdown in filming for TV, feature films and advertising since mid-February and with the lockdown extended until at least some time in the early summer, it is unlikely that filming will pick up again in a major way until late summer or early autumn and the diminishing daylight hours for location shooting and backlog of demand for studio space will mean not all productions will be able to recommence even then. In the meantime, many freelancers will have no work or pay unless they find alternative work. It will be critical that government funding support is withdrawn on a phased basis, to avoid cliff-edge effects. Post-production and visual effects, which come at the end of the process, are likely to find the impact on them delayed, and that also need to be reflected in a gradual withdrawal of government support.

### Diversity and inclusion

We will need research to validate but anecdotal evidence suggests freelancers from poorer backgrounds are more likely than their better-off colleagues to drop out of the industry because of current financial problems and reduced confidence about the future. Support to investigate this would be helpful and to point to the way to potential solutions.

### Longer-term pipeline and inclusion challenges

One of the likely casualties is the confidence of parents, careers advisers and other influencers to support young people who want to enter freelance creative industry careers, especially those from poorer backgrounds. A recent survey showed that 60% of school students had never had careers

advice about work in the creative industries or had been actively discouraged from pursuing such careers because of concerns about their on-going viability and security. This suggests two important steps that need to be taken:

1. Addressing the genuine insecurities faced by freelancers (as discussed above)
2. Ensuring work already started through the Creative Careers Programme is maintained

### Support for skills

Skills gaps and skills shortages were clearly identified before the current crisis as one of the main inhibitors to the growth prospects of the sector. As the industry begins to rebuild, those skills challenges will re-emerge. ScreenSkills as the industry-led body for skills in the sector, uses skills funds paid on a voluntary basis by film and TV productions to support a wide range of training initiatives aimed at supporting individual to enter and progress their careers, with a particular focus on out of London. However, the production hiatus means we expect that income for financial year 2020/21 to reduce by over 50% from a projected £4.2 million to about £2 million. The vast majority of these funds go to direct support for individuals (upskilling, bursaries, mentoring schemes etc) with only a very small portion going on administration. Any support from government to help at least partly fill that funding gap would have a hugely positive impact in terms of our ability to support the workforce. There will also be a need for new skills in the industry, to ensure the workplace is a safe place to work, post Covid-19 lockdown. This training will need to be designed, funded and rolled-out.

## **What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?**

From a skills perspective, we have quickly pivoted our training delivery model from mainly face-to-face to online support:

- We have evolved a phased approach to providing activity focusing on: immediate need – Finance and Employment legal support; skills training to get ahead; training in readiness to return to work; new normal training when back at work.
- We now have three types on on-line resources: E-Learning modules; remote live events and training; on-demand available on our website as a result of recording the remote live activity. This has created a new workflow to ensure correct pathways are followed and also provide stability and much needed support to the freelance workforce. It has been crucial not only to provide learning opportunities but also ensure a sense of community for the workforce to retain their skills for when industry returns.
- We have also been able to tailor the programme of online session on offer to mirror the change in circumstances, so more ‘help’ session will be run the early weeks of lockdown, and more ‘prepare for work’ sessions in the late stages of lockdown as the workforce/industry re-emerges to its new reality. We have learnt this agility is essential in the current climate to galvanise a largely freelance workforce, to keep them inspired by the possibilities and opportunities of the sector in these uncertain times.

Some outcomes (as at 1st May 2020):

- Since the lockdown in March, we have run over 120 online training sessions
- Over 12,000 individuals have attended those sessions, with the following diversity and inclusion breakdowns:

- 16.4% BAME
- 9.8% disabled
- 14.4% LGBT
- 76.3% non-paid schooling
- 44% live outside London
- 71.9% women

#### Lessons learnt from conversion to online

Almost all of our current training slate migrates successfully to online delivery although it must be noted there is growing evidence of 'Zoom-fatigue' so sessions benefit generally from compression to mitigate this. Particular successes have been our mental health/well-being slate and Q&A/panels on guidance and advice on fast-moving topics which all translate well online.

Craft/tech is the only area where it proves more difficult. Editing, sound, edit producing and writing sessions have translated well online but others such as camera training necessitates the trainee having their own kit which immediately excludes people.

#### Lessons learnt about design and delivery

It has been essential to ensure that our training offer remains current, agile and responsive to the current status-quo. Culling past offerings such as 'crewing-up' 'location filming' in response to quasi non-existent production. Design and build of new content has been key and successes are: remote working from an HR and individual perspective, resilience during crisis, looking after your mental health when working from home, regular mental health drop-ins, panel sessions with BECTU, PACT offering guidance on latest gov developments, 1-1 support: coaching, changing career and retraining.

We have been key in making sure freelancers have opportunities to both reskill and feel connected during lockdown with unique access to high-profile contacts to help progress their career once production ramps up with sessions such as our 'Lunch with Commissioners' and 'Industry Greats' masterclasses. There have been 19 industry greats masterclasses in the first 4 weeks including founders of independent production companies, and award-winning writers, directors and documentary film makers. Commissioners from BBC, CH4, Ch5, Sky, Amazon, UKTV and ITV have all taken part so far – more to come.

#### Lessons learnt re train the trainer

There has been a significant appetite from the training community for the screen industries to understand how to pivot their own courses to online. During March and April 2020, ScreenSkills has run seven online courses for over 100 industry trainers and lecturers in how to deliver effective online training (i.e. using Zoom or other video-conferencing software).

### **How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?**

Until and unless the virus is eradicated, there will be a range of issues arising such as the impact on insurance, health and safety on set etc. The BFI Taskforce (which ScreenSkills is part of) response to this consultation will address those broad issues.

In terms of skills, the key things we need to do and on which we need government support are summarised below.

### Short-term

1. Looking at whether there could be DCMS funding to help at least partly plug the gap this year from the inevitable drop in income from the HETV, Film, and Children's Skills Funds to ensure we can maintain support for freelancers in particular with an emphasis on out of London.
2. Support for training to ensure people returning to work have the knowledge they need to be able to work safely and productively under whatever new health and safety rules and best practices emerge as we come out of the crisis.

### Longer term (via the Spending Review)

1. Funding support for Higher and Further Education institutions to apply for our quality marking programme ('ScreenSkills Select') which uses existing industry professionals to identify quality courses relevant to working in the industry so that these can be signposted clearly to potential new entrants – which is particularly useful for those without industry connections and from poorer backgrounds
2. Transitional funding for 2022/23 to maintain continuity when the current BFI Future Film Skills contract expires. The unknown at this point is the impact of lottery fund receipts reducing
3. Longer-term funding for the continuation of the Creative Careers Programme (CCP)
4. Explicit recognition by Gov that ScreenSkills is the lead on skills in the sector, so there is coherence and standardisation across skills
5. Other potentials:
  - a. Digital repository of good practice
  - b. Talent database
  - c. Doubling down on prioritising levelling up of the industry across the UK