

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee: Inquiry into the creative industries workforce.

Response from: Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership (CCRSP) – Creative Sector Cluster Group

Question 1: What is the current health of the sector's workforce, including the impacts of the pandemic, Brexit and cost of living crisis? Have workers left the sector, and what impact has this had?

A significant impact on the Creative sector was initially reported to the CCRSP due to the discontinuation of productions, closure of venues and furloughing of the majority of the workforce. However, the sector responded positively in the region with the re-start of existing Film and TV productions over the summer 2020 period and start of many new productions in spring 2021.

There were many factors that initially made it difficult to ascertain the full impact of Covid-19, including the reliance on freelancers within the sector and having a large proportion of the workforce furloughed. Since production have re-started, freelancers are again being contracted, with many changing industries from stage to screen to align with the growth of Film and TV production in the region. Recruitment was initially halted but increased to coincide with productions re-starting or due to commence in the near future.

Concerns were initially raised that skilled workers may not be available within the region if tempted to seek employment further afield in countries where Covid-19 guidelines allowed productions and events to re-start earlier than in Wales. The sector has been regularly reporting skills shortages within the Film & TV workforce; mainly due to the number of crew and post-production staff required to meet the needs of the productions that are filming concurrently in the region.

Question 2: How financially stable is the sector and how suitable are pay and working conditions?

N/a

Question 3: How equal, diverse and inclusive is the sector? How can this be improved?

Particularly within the Film & TV industry, a concerted effort has been made to overcome the challenge of underrepresentation. It's been recognised that a big cultural change is needed if the industry is to achieve the vision of a diverse workforce that represents the communities in which it is situated.

Interventions have been developed to reach those from a Global Majority, those with work limiting conditions and those from a low socio-economic background. Employers are based within some of the most diverse, yet deprived areas of the region and this is not adequately reflected within the workforce. The sector is dedicated to creating a sustainable workforce that represents the local community within which it works. For example, in March 2022, Screen Alliance Wales ran a Careers Fair at Butetown Pavilion in Cardiff, with 50 community members attending who were further invited to a Recruitment Carousel Day hosted at Wolf Studios Wales.

Events such as these have encouraged members of the community, who previously had not considered applying for roles, to submit their CVs and many were successful in gaining employment on two of the largest series currently in production in the UK.

Screen Alliance Wales have also successfully recruited seven trainees on the current production in Wolf Studios Wales, all of whom are from a diverse or protected category and several are from the local community that surround the studios.

Engagement with the local communities has proven invaluable as those employed from those areas have, importantly, been the greatest advocates for changing the perception of the Creative sector and encouraging others to view it as a future career. Linked to this, another obstacle encountered has been parents perception of the industry, with many sceptical of the industry and reluctant to allow their children to enter into it.

Key to overcoming this obstacle will be having an on-going presence in these communities and showing them that the Creative sector is very much rooted in the community.

Question 4: How sufficient are skills and training opportunities? Are there gaps, and how should they be filled?

It was initially noted that it would be difficult to have a full understanding of the impact of the pandemic until the whole sector re-opened, although TV and Film industries reported no skills underutilisation and increased productivity. Prior to Covid-19, it was reported that the availability of a skilled workforce was appropriate to meet the needs of the creative activity taking place within the region, however concerns raised by the Film and TV industry in early 2021 around shortages of skilled production crew and post-production staff. These concerns around skills shortages across the sector still remained in September 2021.

Skills gaps that were noted early in the pandemic in relation to roles such as Finance, Accountancy, Business Administration and Legal Affairs, and were reported as increasing in spring 2021 due to growth within the sector. Other skills shortages reported in spring 2021 included ICT roles in post-production 'Tech Teams' and production crew. Also reported that a larger 'pool of choice' is required within the region for roles such as Casting Directors, Directors, Actors and those from an Ethnic background. Location Manager roles were identified as particularly challenging to retain as the individual will often leave the production before it finishes for a new contract.

An increased number of mid-level managers has been reported as a potential future skill shortage and that the loss of skills was more apparent in roles that receive lower salaries such as Box Office, Front of House and Tech teams. A potential skill gap continues to be highlighted for higher level IT professionals, which is currently being mitigated by recruitment from geographical areas further afield and the offer of home working.

It has been suggested that further investment in software and hardware is still required enable the workforce to adequately work from home, although a mixed response from employers with some now deeming changes permanent and others suggesting they are still temporary with a planned return to pre-Covid working practices. Working patterns and hours have extended requiring 'tech support' to be available outside of normal working hours.

Mobility of the workforce continues to be reported as a challenge with requirements for the workforce to often drive to locations due to them not being easily accessible via public transport.

HGV/LGV driver shortages reported to also be affecting the sector, with limited drivers available to move vehicles to and around TV and Film sets.

Question 5: What has been the impact of support from public bodies such as the Welsh Government, and is further support needed?

The majority of staff within the Creative sector were initially furloughed, however concerns were raised about how many freelancers were able access the Job Retention Scheme with reports in summer 2020 that some freelancers within the Creative and Cultural sectors were struggling to access funds.

Government support noted as very helpful for the 'independents' within the sector, although some organisations were initially not able to apply to the Economic Resilience Fund and reported difficulties with applications for subsequent phases.