Industry insight - Media

In a nutshell

In the UK, the media industry employs around half a million people and encompasses opportunities in animation, computer games, film production, interactive media, radio and television.

Increasingly, skills are sought in multi-platforming where television, digital and interactive media combine to support TV programmes and film productions with interactive websites or computer games. The media and telecommunications industry is regulated by the Office of Communications (Ofcom).

The development of new technology has ensured that this has been a growing industry over the past decade, although the most recent survey by Creative Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for the Creative Industries suggested that the media industry has been affected by the recession (2009). There has been a decline in employment across many sectors, although independent television production and cinema exhibition continue to grow. According to Ofcom’s 2012 Communications Market Report, TV revenues increased by almost 5% in 2011-12, while radio revenues were up by more than 3%.

What kind of work can I do?

- **Broadcast television** - is going through a period of change with the merging of smaller production companies to create much larger businesses and the growth of broadband in the UK changing viewer habits. The biggest broadcast TV stations remain the BBC and BSkyB but these are supplemented by 300 cable and satellite TV stations and 850 independent television production companies (Creative Skillset, 2012). This is a rapidly growing sector, particularly for cable/satellite and independent companies. Around 28% of the workforce is employed on a freelance basis and people are judged by the quality of their work rather than their formal qualifications. Despite this, 63% have at least an undergraduate degree.

- **Radio** - the airwaves are dominated by the BBC, which has 10 distinct radio networks. The UK has around 600 licensed radio stations, including three national commercial radio stations and hundreds of local commercial and community stations. The majority of people working in radio are based in London, although there are opportunities in other areas of the UK in local and community radio. Two-thirds of the radio workforce has a degree and around a quarter are freelance or on fixed-term contracts.
• **Film** - the UK film industry employs a total workforce of around 28,000 people. Just under two-thirds are in exhibition, a third are in production and 4% are in distribution. The majority of film production crews are based in London and 91% are freelance. They work mainly in the production of programmes, film shorts or commercials. There are also opportunities in areas such as accounting, publicity, casting, special effects, stunts, catering and transport.

• **Animation** - is expensive to produce but generates high revenue and the UK is one of the leaders in the field. The sector employs around 4,700 people and more than three-quarters of the workforce has a degree. There are major animation production centres outside London, in Bristol, Manchester and Cardiff.

• **Documentary filmmaking** - relies on multi-skilling, i.e. directing, shooting and producing. Determination is required in this area to develop the skills and gain recognition as much of the work is about securing funding for initial ideas. The **Documentary Filmmakers Group (DFG)** produces the online guide *How to Get Ahead in Documentary*, which may be helpful.

• **Commercials** - freelance staff are usually selected through advertising agencies for commercial productions.

• **Corporate production** - comprises mostly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Projects include using film, CD-ROM or DVD formats for training, PR and sales. These are more likely to be found distributed across the country because of the smaller scale of the film production involved.

• **Facilities houses** - own and maintain high-value ‘kit’ for highly specialised forms of film production, which they supply to all sectors of the audiovisual industry. The main jobs are in maintenance, preparation of equipment and a small number in ‘out with the kit’ positions.

• **Interactive media** - comprises a collection of areas including web and internet, offline multimedia, electronic games and interactive TV. There are opportunities to work in IT, telecommunications, broadcasting, design and publishing. Employers welcome graduates with backgrounds in games programming, animation, computing science and design.

• **Game design** - the UK has one of the largest gaming industries and many of the world’s most profitable studios are based here. The sector employs 9,000 people and contributes approximately £1billion to the UK economy every year (TIGA, 2012). Jobs are available in many areas of the country with major hubs in the Midlands, the North West and the east of England. Around 80% of video game workers have a degree and many also have postgraduate qualifications.

The following profiles are examples of key jobs that exist in the media industry:

• ** Animator**
• Broadcast engineer
• Broadcast journalist
• Film/video editor
• Games developer
• Lighting technician, broadcasting/film/video
• Location manager
• Production designer, theatre/television/film
• Programme researcher, broadcasting/film/video
• Radio broadcast assistant
• Radio producer
• Runner, broadcasting/film/video
• Sound technician, broadcasting/film/video
• Television camera operator
• Television/film/video producer
• Television floor manager
• Television production assistant

**What’s it like working in this industry?**

- Working in the media industry can be very demanding. You may be required to work long hours and spend periods away from home. The percentage of people working on a freelance basis can be very high with subsequent competition for contracts, periods of unemployment and responsibility for personal tax, VAT, etc. The vast majority of contracts are obtained by word of mouth so talent, ability and networking skills are vital.

- According to Creative Skillset, only around 7% of people working in the industry are from BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) backgrounds. BAME employees work mainly in studio operations, editorial, journalism and sport.

- The Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network (BCIDN), which is part of the Employers' Forum on Disability, and the Cultural Diversity Network are organisations that work to redress the diversity imbalance of the workforce.

- Women in Film and Television UK (WFTV) represents the voice of women in the creative media and provides information on job opportunities as well as reports, statistics and national awards. Women represent half of those providing legal expertise in the industry and the vast majority of personnel in areas such as costume, make up, hair and design. All figures vary according to industry and job role.

- Around 188,000 people are employed in the audiovisual industries. If film production and performance were also to be included in this number, the figure would be closer to 500,000 (Creative Skillset Employment Census 2009).
• The big areas within this sector are terrestrial TV and independent TV production, which together employ approximately 50,000 people. Radio employs 22,000 people and interactive media (computer games, online multimedia, web, internet, interactive TV, mobile content) employs 34,200.

• Of all the people working in the industry, just under a quarter work on a freelance basis but this varies hugely depending on the sector and role.

• Jobs are available throughout the UK, but the majority are found in London and the South East, with just over half of the people in the media industry working in these areas. Around a third works in other English regions. Employment has increased significantly in North West England with the relocation of part of the BBC’s workforce to Salford Quays in 2011.

• The remainder (just over one in ten of the workforce) are distributed fairly evenly between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Creative Skillset Employment Census 2009). There are also opportunities overseas.

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**Entry and progression**

**How do I find a job?**

Networking and speculative approaches are generally more effective ways to find jobs in the media. Relatively few people (around 30%) find work by responding to an advert. In order to take advantage of opportunities which arise, graduates need to be well qualified, highly skilled and very committed. Approaching companies 'cold' for work experience or employment should be underpinned with extensive research to find out what the company does and how you might fit in.

Creative Skillset recommends that students get involved with developing media ideas, work on projects or produce film shorts. You should get as much experience as you can in local or student radio, writing articles, making videos, etc.

You might consider being a runner for a media company, which can give an insight into all aspects of media production. An understanding of the latest software can be incredibly useful but you should also be able to demonstrate knowledge of industry trends, changes in the way people are using creative media, innovative products, business, finance and legal issues.

Search for jobs and keep up to date by reading industry sources such as:

• business magazines or media press, e.g. Broadcast, Screen International (film industry), Edge (games industry) or New Media Age;
directories, e.g. The Knowledge and the International Visual Communications Association (IVCA) web directory;

websites, e.g. grapevinejobs, Mandy's International Film and TV Production Resources, British Interactive Media Association (BIMA), New Media Knowledge, TIGA and Imagine.

There are not many graduate training schemes but there is a small number of new entrant training schemes. Examples include:

- BBC Trainee Schemes;
- Cyfle (Wales) runs training schemes and a variety of courses.

Competition for relatively few places is intense and candidates need to demonstrate a proven interest or basic experience in the chosen area.

See Creative Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for the Creative Industries for more details on new entrant schemes as well as courses provided in Creative Skillset Media Academies across the UK which combine study with skills training and media placements. There are also screen bursaries and Creative Skillset-funded courses for the media.

**What skills do I need?**

Specific and technical skill sets vary depending on the sector and job role, but many employers in the media industry look for the following generic skills:

- ability to think creatively;
- strong communication skills;
- resilience and flexibility;
- organisational skills and the ability to meet deadlines;
- ability to manage relationships;
- tact, diplomacy and negotiation;
- innovation;
- ability to work well under pressure;
- sound decision making;
- ability to think on your feet;
- excellent levels of literacy and numeracy;
- IT skills;
- an understanding and knowledge of the industry.

For many jobs, a degree is not a requirement. However, well over half of the workforce are graduates or equivalent, so you may be expected to have degree-level qualifications. This varies by sector with some having large numbers of staff with postgraduate qualifications, e.g. animation.
Where can I find work experience?

Whether you are interested in a specific role or simply in working within the broadcast, film and interactive media sector, you should try and secure some work experience.

Most work experience placements will be either low paid or unpaid. A few companies offer internships but these are extremely competitive.

Work experience is increasingly regarded as an essential prerequisite for jobs and certain courses in this industry. Securing experience requires creative thinking, persistence, resilience and flexibility.

The following companies offer graduate, work experience and internship opportunities:

- **BBC Work Experience** schemes.
- **Channel 4** - offers work placements, a 20-month graduate programme and various training schemes, including schemes in production and investigative journalism. Also see [4Talent](#).
- **ITV Jobs** - offers work experience in news, business, television and broadcast scheduling, as well as HR, finance and marketing. Placements range from two to four weeks. Also offers a two-year graduate programme and a year-long trainee scheme for budding journalists.
- **Endemol UK**
- **Sky Jobs** - opportunities include placement schemes, internships and work experience across a wide range of departments.
- **Cyfle** (Wales)
- **RDF Television**

Competition for relatively few places is intense and candidates need to demonstrate a proven interest or basic experience in the chosen area. Use trade press and directories to make speculative applications. Websites such as the [Film Distributors' Association](#) list work placement opportunities.

Independent production companies, community radio and local terrestrial television are good places for first jobs and work experience. Screen agencies will sometimes advertise for 'runners'. Job shadowing is another way of gaining experience.

Make sure that you appear focused in any work experience application that you make. Research the companies in advance and state why you want to gain work experience. Find out the name of the person that you should write to and make sure that you are aware of the company’s output.

Also try to develop a showreel, soundreel or portfolio. Regional screen agencies offer help and advice. For films, try [filmmaking.net](http://filmmaking.net) and [The Guerilla Film Maker's Pocketbook](#).
Is postgraduate study useful?

In the interactive media areas of web design, CD-ROM production and computer games, the majority of the professional workforce has a postgraduate qualification (Creative Skillset, 2012). This can be advantageous for candidates whose first degree is not directly related to this area of work.

A major advantage of postgraduate courses is that they usually include work placements. Look for high levels of practical content in any course you are thinking of doing and make sure that industry-standard equipment is used and qualifications are recognised. Also check out whether you can apply for bursaries or whether you have to pay.

Contact Creative Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for the Creative Industries for advice about the most appropriate type and level of course for the jobs you are targeting - they have information about specific funding opportunities. Details of postgraduate opportunities are also available from the Creative Skillset/BFI course database.

How can my career develop?

Experience gained through a work placement and a good portfolio may start your career, but your subsequent development may well be based on your ability and talent and the recommendations these bring to other producers and directors. This is particularly true in fields where there is a high percentage of freelancers, such as photography and camera work. A willingness to learn and continue training, particularly in new and digital media, will keep your skills up to date.

A good knowledge of multi-platform media production will allow you to transfer your skills relatively easily from one sector to another.

The media industry is so varied that it would be impossible to delineate the kind of career progression that is possible in other sectors. However, good qualifications, high levels of skill and commitment to both the industry and networking should ensure that you are in the best position to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Typical employers

Big players

- The main employers in the television broadcast sector include the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. Apart from the main players, small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) dominate the industry.
- Independent production companies, which make programmes for the broadcasters, include: FremantleMedia (includes Talkback Thames); All 3
Media; HIT Entertainment; IMG (UK); Endemol UK; Tinopolis; Tiger Aspect; and RDF Television. There are also around 300 cable and satellite broadcasters, dominated by such names as BSkyB and Virgin Media, and 850 independent companies, some of which are very small (a quarter employ only two to four people).

- In radio, the BBC has six national, four digital and a number of local stations, as well as the World Service. For a list of UK stations see Radio Now. Many are very small with only a small percentage (2%) employing more than 250 people (Creative Skillset Employment Census 2009).

- The large organisations in film are the screen agencies and the British Film Institute (BFI). However, most people work for production companies such as Pathé UK, BBC Films and DNA Films. Check out the Film Distributors' Association for details of film distribution companies. One of the big players in film production is Pinewood Studios Group, which includes Pinewood, Shepperton and Teddington Studios.

- In animation, big names include Aardman and The Moving Picture Company.

- Employers in the interactive media are big agencies like SapientNitro, AKQA, LBi (including bigmouthmedia), KIT digital and 20:20.

- For the games industry, see TIGA, the trade association for the games industry, and The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment (UKIE). Big players include Rebellion, Rockstar North, EA Games, Blitz Games Studios and Square Enix Europe.

- Post-production companies are generally SMEs. Use directories such as the Marketing and Creative Handbook and The Knowledge to find contacts.

**Self-employment**

Being self-employed or working as a freelancer is common in the media industry. However, it can be difficult to become established, as the sector is competitive and you have to be prepared to deal with changes in the industry.

According to Creative Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for the Creative Industries, about a quarter of freelancers have too much work, while most 'get by' and a small proportion struggle to get any work at all. Networking is crucial in this line of work and may mean the difference between being a successful freelancer and being out of work. You can gain initial experience through work placements, competitions, undertaking a qualification with an in-built period of work experience and developing your own portfolio relevant to the area of work you wish to enter. Subsequent work is dependent on ability and contacts.

You will also need to take into consideration the fact that you will need to manage your own finances including tax, VAT and National Insurance contributions.
Opportunities abroad

There are opportunities for employment in the media across the world. Since much of the work is freelance and English is frequently the operating language, employment will depend on experience or contacts. The following websites may be helpful:

- **BBC Worldwide** - the commercial arm of the trust, which has offices throughout the world and aims to create and develop media content and brands around the world. It has production offices in New York, Los Angeles, Mumbai and Paris, as well as 11 sales offices in different locations.
- **Mandy's International Film and TV Production Resources** - provides worldwide job vacancies.

Satellite and cable TV as well as exports from British film and television have opened up a global marketplace. Jobs include modifying formats, reworking, international sales and rights negotiation. **MEDIA Desk UK** has details of audiovisual funding, festivals and training across Europe.

Points to consider include:

- obtaining work overseas can depend on the limitations of work visas;
- if you are interested in working for a European organisation rather than being placed overseas by a British one, it is essential to know the language of the country in which you want to work;
- it can be easier to live in the country first, in order to establish contacts and understand the local media culture. However, this will depend on visa limitations.

**Will my qualifications be recognised?**

The nature of employment in the media means that formal educational qualifications are simply the starting point for employment abroad. According to evidence from interviews with BBC employees and radio and independent film producers, it is the portfolio of experience you bring which defines your employability in a given context. If you wish to work abroad you should start as early as possible to develop experience and evidence of engagement in specific projects in your chosen field.
Future trends

The media sector is changing rapidly, with proposed changes and daily mergers. Make sure that you keep up to date by reading the media press and looking at relevant websites and publications.

Technology and digitalisation

Between 2008 and 2012, the old analogue signal in the UK was switched off and replaced with a clearer digital signal. Almost everyone will be able to access digital TV which means there are now a wider choice of channels and more space for broadband services, local TV and high-definition television (HDTV). At the beginning of 2012, 98.5% of all households with a television had digital TV (Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board (BARB)).

The effects of digitalisation and the need to satisfy an ever increasing customer demand for choice mean the sector is constantly developing. Recent developments have included the increasing use of interactive media with companies using online player websites to broaden the appeal and availability of their programming. Radio has also seen major developments with relatively cheap licences becoming available for internet-based radio broadcasts.

The use of broadband technology has increased in UK homes, which has lead to the success of mobile media. 80% of UK homes now have internet access and each household owns on average three internet-enabled devices (Ofcom Communications Market Report, 2012).

Skills

The biggest anticipated skills changes are in business, creative strategy, and products and services. Workers in this sector need to have more diverse and wide-ranging skills such as technical processes, and general skills such as business/legal knowledge. There is a demand for skills across digital and new media as well as skills in negotiation, diplomacy, management, leadership, resilience and flexibility.

Globalisation

The UK’s audiovisual industries have a strong export record and international working practices. This is helped by the global importance of the English language and the popularity of UK programmes and formats. It is anticipated that the key growth areas for UK exporters are sales of formats and co-productions with international partners. The UK is now the global leader in exploiting format rights internationally, and is also an important driver of world growth in co-productions between companies in different countries.
These business models have been particularly successful in opening up the US market. Globalisation will inevitably bring competition, which will tap into the UK’s domestic market. This competition will probably mean that outsourcing work overseas will increase. Rising economies such as China and South Korea may become more influential. UK film production faces increasing competition from Australia, Canada and Eastern Europe.

**Mergers and acquisitions**

In the television sector, mergers and acquisitions between production companies are leading to an emergence of new big players on the UK market. Small independent companies have merged to create larger enterprises, such as Endemol. There is great potential for growth in the independent production industry and within interactive media.

**‘Content is king’**

With the increase in channels and platforms on which to watch content (computers, tablets, mobile devices, etc), television audiences have fragmented in recent years. Increasingly, audiences watch programmes over the internet and seek content at convenient times, rather than following traditional channels and schedules. This is particularly true of younger viewers. People are also spending more time on video-sharing sites and in January 2012, 3.7million YouTube videos were watched by UK users (Ofcom).

**Demography and diversity**

In terms of TV and radio consumption, the over-60s far outweigh the under-18s. TV viewing among the over-55s has increased in the past decade, while there has been a slight drop in radio listening. However, the 65+ audience still spends over 25 hours a week listening to the radio. The BBC retains the market share of the TV audience (33%), followed by ITV (23%) and then Channel 4 and BSkyB (BARB, 2011). Since this is a growing sector of the population, the media industry, which employs vast numbers of under-35s, will have to bear this in mind when scheduling future programmes in order to retain market share.

Structures of households are also diverse, with a large percentage of single-occupant households. There is a need to reflect and consider these changes and diversities, both in terms of audiences and the media workforce itself. Employment in the media appears to underrepresent certain sectors of the population such as ethnic minorities, women and people with disabilities. However, recent moves by the media as well as the work of organisations such as the **Broadcasting and Creative Industries Disability Network (BCIDN)** are going some way to redressing the balance and insuring that the industry represents the views of all users.
Jargon buster

There is a huge range of technical vocabulary used in media production dependent on the specific medium. A comprehensive list can be found on Creative Skillset: The Sector Skills Council for the Creative Industries but the following provides explanations as to the commonly used terms used in recruitment literature:

- **Acquisitions** - completed and aired programmes that are bought or 'acquired' by another broadcaster.
- **Account executive** - a person within a production company who acts as a go-between for both the client and production team.
- **BARB** - Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board - pan-industry body that measures television viewing figures.
- **Business-to-business (B2B)** - corporate production companies that normally work for business or industrial organisations to enable them to deliver messages or communications for them via different media to other businesses or organisations, clients or the general public.
- **Cable/satellite platforms** - TV channels which broadcast via cable or satellite usually requiring subscription by viewers and connection via cabling or a satellite dish.
- **Co-production** - a production in which more than one broadcaster is providing the funding for the project.
- **Distribution** - the sale of ideas for programmes or completed programmes to broadcasters around the world including within the UK.
- **Facilities** - services and specialised technical equipment provided by independent companies such as filming equipment, post-production facilities (e.g. editing suites that are only required short term), studio hire and special effects.
- **Freelancers** - people who work on a fixed short-term contract. Some sectors, such as film production, employ large numbers of freelancers as the work is not constant, minimising the need for permanent staff.
- **Graphics** - computer-generated images (CGI) or sequences, which can be in two dimensions (2D) or three dimensions (3D).
- **Independent production company** - a company that is independent of any broadcaster and produces programmes for several of them. They may also make programmes for non-broadcast purposes (for corporate clients) or produce TV-related material, like interactive or multimedia content.
- **IVCA** - International Visual Communication Association - trade association of corporate production companies.
- **Kit** - high-value kit, including cameras, cranes, sound equipment, lighting, special effects, etc.
- **Multichannel** - TV platforms like Freeview, cable and satellite that offer viewers multiple channels in addition to the five main channels.

- **Multichannel platform production** - the interrelation between television programming and online offshoots such as online chats and information about the programmes, cast, etc.

- **Multiplex** - a bundle of digital radio channels on a single frequency.

- **Ofcom (Office of Communications)** - the government body responsible for regulating radio, television and telecommunications.

- **Pact** - Producers’ Alliance for Cinema and Television - trade association for independent production companies in feature film, television, digital, children’s and animation.

- **Production team** - consists of all the people involved in producing a media product, from engineers to directors.

- **Public service** - programming that aims to improve society by informing the audience and catering to a diverse range of viewers. In the UK, BBC Television is a public service broadcaster and is funded by the TV licence fee.

- **RAJAR** - Radio Joint Audience Research - pan-industry body that measures radio listening figures.

- **Rights** - the copyright that the creator of a TV idea, programme or format owns.

- **RSL (Restricted Service Licence)** - in radio, a licence serving a single site, e.g. a university or hospital, or a wider area on a short-term basis. In television, a local licence which usually covers a 25-mile broadcasting radius and lasts for four years.

- **Runner** - a catch-all term referring to personnel in TV units who perform multiple roles from coffee making to script editing.

- **Share** - the percentage of those with TVs or radios turned on who are viewing or listening to a specific programme.

- **Streaming content** - audio/video files which are sent over the internet in compressed form and consumed by the user as they arrive, as opposed to being downloaded.

Written by AGCAS editors, October 2012

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