

The voice of the production manager must be heard

The current talent shortage in production management is emblematic of a bigger challenge *argues Richard Wallis*

Production management now sits at the top of a long list of hard-to-fill roles in TV. Huge growth in UK production over recent years has simply not been matched by available talent. Current skills shortages are not limited to production management of course, but the role of the production manager has become emblematic of the bigger challenge.

Last year Channel 4, the BBC, Paramount and UKTV announced their intention to jointly inject £1 million into the creation of a Production Management Skills Fund to boost 'skills and capacity in the sector.' Such initiatives are welcome of course, but they are unlikely to be a panacea. TV's talent problem is not one that will be solved simply by increasing supply. As Adrian Pegg's piece ([What has happened to the role of production managers?](#)) clearly conveys, there's a widely-held feeling that workloads have increased at the same time as the parameters and expectations of the role have been quietly expanding. In other words, the problem is more complicated than simply one of not having enough skilled people. And then there is the elephant in the room. Most of these roles are undertaken by women. We would prefer not to mention it, but sorry to say there is a clear correlation between the gendered nature of the role and the sense that it's a line of work that is not really valued or properly rewarded. This also raises broader questions about work-life balance and family-friendly employment policies: there is a notable brain-drain of skilled and experienced women from the industry who find they simply cannot reconcile the roles of television professional and parent. It is as much a retention problem as it is one of skills and supply.

The industry needs to get serious about addressing the PM shortage. In order to do so effectively we need to be better informed. It is only by listening carefully to what people who work - or used to work - in production management tell us about their experience that we will be able to understand the complex nature of the problem. That is why this issue has become the focus of a new research project called **Understanding the Production Management skills gap in UK TV**. The project is led by a group of us based at Bournemouth University's Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, supported by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust. This week we launch [The Production Managers Survey 2023](#) which is an important step in developing our understanding of this issue.

Based on our research to date, we already have some expectations about what this survey could tell us, but there are likely to be surprises and a level of detail that we think will shed new light on the problem. And what we learn from production managers is going to have broader implications for how we understand other skills shortage areas. What is vital is that we pay close attention to what those with direct experience of these roles have to tell us about what is working and what makes working difficult.

No matter how much recruitment and skills development we invest in, the only way to sort out TV's talent shortages is greater honesty about what it will take to retain this highly skilled and experienced labour force that is so integral to the continuing success of our industry.

Here is the link to [The Production Managers Survey 2023](#). If you work in production management - or have previously done so - please take a few minutes to complete this. And please share widely, especially with colleagues who may have left the industry.

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[Hyperlink for survey to follow \(Wednesday\).](#)