

Where have all the PMs gone?

Addressing the
production management
skills gap in UK TV

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About CEMP

The Centre for Excellence in Media Practice (CEMP) is a research centre based in the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University. CEMP delivers research projects funded by media organisations, charities, research councils, government departments and the private sector. Our research spans media, communication and journalism, with a focus on: media education and professional development; media management and media industry practices; creative practice and practice-led research; sustainability and ethics within media and communication practice.

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PREFACE

Claire Walker, Chair of the Production Managers Association (PMA)

The Production Management role has changed a lot in the last decade. It's sometimes hard for other people to fully understand the different hats we need to wear at any given time. Gaining these different skills takes time, perseverance, and a bit of luck. To lose a good and experienced PM from the industry means years of skills and knowledge just waltzing (or running) out the door. It can't easily be replaced. It should be a big red flag to those of us left to start looking at the problem, but it hasn't been fully investigated until now. I thank the authors of this report for looking into a matter that is important to us at the PMA, but is also critical for the wider production industry.

In the production management community we have spoken about many of the issues highlighted in this report, seeing them all laid bare does make me question why would anyone work in a job like this!? The reality is, thankfully, it's not always so hard, but let's not kid ourselves, it's bad enough that people are leaving the industry in their droves and if things don't change, more will follow, and who would choose to replace them in this type of working environment?

Working in TV can be exceptionally rewarding but it can also be hard, brutal even. Look at the last few years of feast and famine on the work front, including the current bleak spell. Let's not give people any more reasons to leave. Treating people with dignity and respect, giving everyone realistic workloads, and recognising and rewarding the sometimes superhuman efforts production teams make in order to get TV made should not be a big ask.

While this report does point to problems that can be uncomfortable to confront, us telly people are especially good when facing a challenge. This report gives us all the opportunity to look at our company/ production / personal attitudes, values, and behaviours and challenges us all to be better - to call out outdated and unacceptable behaviours and support those who are making a difference.

Let's try and keep PMs within the industry they don't want to leave, by being better.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective production management is critical to successful programme making and has the potential to offer a rewarding career.

Employers consistently report skills gaps in this area, struggling to recruit to production management teams.

A lack of visibility or negative image both within and beyond the industry impacts on recruitment to this department.

A range of factors meanwhile impact on the retention of experienced production staff.

The primary reasons given for leaving, or for thinking about leaving production management are:

- that production management is undervalued, under-estimated and underpaid in comparison with equivalent roles in other departments, with staff experiencing a lack of appreciation and respect from employers and co-workers.
- that production management staff are overloaded, under-resourced and expected to 'mop up' extra responsibilities without the requisite resource or compensation.
- that production management staff are expected to work excessively long hours and to be 'always on', resulting in a poor work-life balance and unhealthy lifestyle.

Additional reasons included:

- the difficulty of reconciling work with family commitments
- a lack of training or opportunities for career progression

There is a gendered dimension to many of the inequities and challenges experienced by production managers, both at a practical and at an attitudinal level.

There is often a corrosive cultural divide between production and editorial which is passed from senior to junior staff, underpinning many of the issues raised by production managers, and impacting on effective working practices in programme-making as well as individual experiences or work in the industry.

While there are many examples of good practice across the industry, and a number of recent moves to address some of the concerns raised, there is still much to be done before the industry can be satisfied PMs are treated equitably and with due respect, and that employers are able to recruit and retain the workforce they need.

We recommend a range of measures to address these concerns, which are set out in more detail at the end of this report:

- Clearly delineated job definitions
- Rates of pay commensurate with role(s)
- Realistic production budgets
- Informed planning and decision making
- Public recognition of the contribution of Production Managers and Line Producers
- Training and development opportunities
- Career advice and education
- Family-friendly policies established and promoted
- Raising awareness of diverse roles across the industry
- Improved work-place culture
- Management training and development

INTRODUCTION

The UK audio-visual sector is the largest in Europe bringing in annual revenues in excess of £20 billion,⁽¹⁾ and employing approximately 86,000, people, including more than 66,000 in film and television production and distribution. (2) Jobs in the sector are seen as aspirational and yet the television industry has for years reported skills shortages impeding both quality of output and global competitiveness. The skills that consistently head the lists of reported shortages across film and television at all levels are those of experienced production managers (PMs). The industry struggles to recruit to the role, and indeed to the more junior production management roles that should provide a pipeline for new talent.

In response to ScreenSkills' 2021 survey of unscripted TV production, 70% of employers reported finding it "very difficult" to recruit production managers and 73% reported similar difficulties recruiting production coordinators.⁽³⁾ A previous review suggests that the picture is much the same in television drama and children's television and film, with production management roles heading the lists of reported skills shortages.⁽⁴⁾ During the pre- and immediately post-COVID production boom, these difficulties became so critical that some productions were reported anecdotally as going ahead without a full production management team in place,⁽⁵⁾ while accelerated upskilling was consistently recorded as being to the detriment of projects as a whole.⁽⁶⁾ 2023 has seen a marked downturn in UK production that has put professionals across the sector out of work. While this may temporarily increase the availability of PMs it is ultimately likely to exacerbate the problem, as more and more experienced PMs take their very transferable skills elsewhere, and cuts to junior roles disrupt the talent pipeline. A longer-term perspective suggests that as the industry recovers, meeting its production management needs will continue to present a challenge.

The skills shortage in production management has often been regarded within the industry as primarily a recruitment problem, with one ScreenSkills respondent blaming the fact that 'production isn't seen as sexy'.⁽⁷⁾ Indeed, there are clearly challenges in bringing new talent into the industry and developing the range of skills required for effective production management. However, retention is also a problem. Experienced individuals are regularly lost to alternative careers (ranging from editorial roles to speciality positions such as intimacy or sustainability coordinators) or leave the industry altogether. This 'brain drain' explains why successive initiatives aimed at building up the production management workforce have failed to resolve the perennial skills shortage.⁽⁸⁾

Through exploring the motivations and experiences of PMs and ex-PMs, our research has sought to better understand:

- how and why individuals are attracted into production management roles in the first place.
- why PMs (and people in more junior 'feeder' roles) leave production management or leave the industry altogether.
- how the industry might attract more individuals into the production 'talent pipeline' and, critically, retain the skilled and talented individuals who already have experience in these roles.

In the sections below, we explain our research methodology and provide a broad overview of our findings before undertaking a more detailed analysis of our data. A brief conclusion is followed by recommendations for employers and other stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

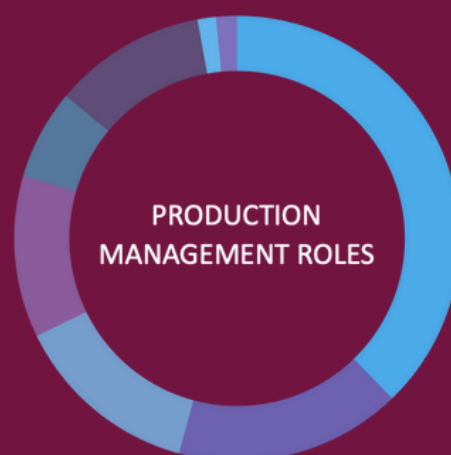
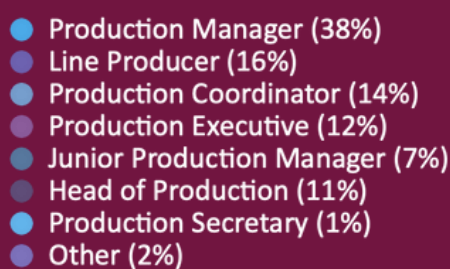
The research that informs this report was undertaken in two phases: a survey, consisting of both multiple choice and free-text prompts designed to give a broad overview of the sector, and a set of interviews designed to provide rich data of the lived experience of a sample of our participants.

The Survey

The first phase took the form of a survey, which we designed with input from a wide range of industry stakeholders (including but not limited to PMs and production executives) and ran for three weeks in early 2023.⁽⁹⁾ The survey was distributed with the help of several trade organisations and news platforms, and through social media, and we encouraged participation not only from those currently undertaking production management roles in the UK screen industries, but also from those who had previously done so but had since left production – or left these industries altogether.

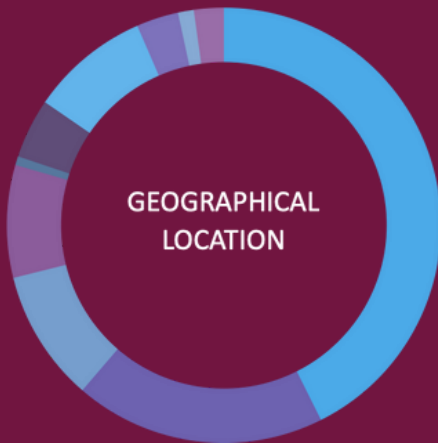
The survey was completed by 765 respondents.⁽¹⁰⁾ Of these:

- 78% worked primarily in Unscripted TV, 8% in Scripted, 14% in both.
- 88% had worked in TV for more than 5 years, and 65% for more than 10.
- 78% were currently working in production management, while 11% had moved into other TV roles and 11% had left the industry altogether
- 38% of the former were currently working as PMs, 39% in more senior roles and 23% were more junior.



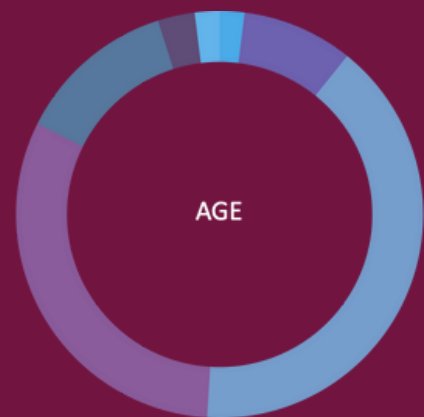
Their demographic profile reflected expectations, based on previous studies and surveys, i.e.:

- 84% were women.
- 73% were aged between 30 and 50.
- 86% were non-disabled.
- 91% were white.
- 62% were based in London and the Southeast



- London (43%)
- South East (19%)
- South West (10%)
- North West (8%)
- North East(1%)
- Midlands(4%)
- Scotland (9%)
- Wales (3%)
- Northern Ireland (1%)
- Yorkshire and the Humber(2%)

- 24 and under (2%)
- 25-29 (9%)
- 30-39 (41%)
- 40-49 (32%)
- 50-59 (13%)
- 60 and over (3%)
- Prefer not to disclose (2%)



A preliminary overview of the quantitative data was produced and circulated for comment by stakeholders;(11) the free-text responses were coded and analysed to inform the design of the interview schedule. The contributions of survey participants are identified in this report by the initials SP and their number in the full list of anonymous responses.

The Interviews

At the end of the survey questionnaire, we asked for volunteers to take part in interviews for the next phase in the project. We selected a sample of 30 individuals for interview, who were broadly representative of the demographic profile of the wider set, and of the range of industry experience reflected in our survey responses.

We conducted semi-structured interviews online between June and October 2023. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed to identify key themes in the narratives. To protect their anonymity, the contributions of interview participants are identified in the report with the initials IP and their number in our original list of volunteers.

WHAT WE FOUND - AN OVERVIEW

This section provides a brief overview of our findings to contextualise the ‘deep dive’ into PM experiences that will follow. It should be noted that some of the challenges reported by our respondents impact professionals across the industry, (12) but others are particular, or particularly nuanced, to the experience of working in production management.

The benefits and rewards

Our respondents made it clear that their work brought many rewards and benefits. For most production management suited their particular abilities, although it was often something of an accidental career.

There are many routes into production careers

The factors considered to be most significant by our respondents in their getting into TV were studying film, TV or media at university (25%), undertaking an internship or work experience (24%) or getting an opportunity through a friend or contact (19%). Many cited a combination of these factors. Relatively few got their first position through answering a job advertisement (14%) or through a targeted course or training scheme.

- Studied Film/TV/Media Production at University (25%)
- Took part on a course or programme outside of formal education (3%)
- Took part in a targeted scheme (2%)
- Through social enterprise, voluntary or unfunded work (3%)
- Work experience or internship (24%)
- Through a friend or contact (19%)
- Answered a job ad (14%)
- Other (10%)



I specialized in medical ethics in my law degree. I was fascinated by it and I thought I'm [going to] research documentaries into this subject, so I wrote to 100 production companies and I got four replies and I got a job as a runner and I never went into research..... (IP.23)

Production managers come from a very broad range of backgrounds, including secretarial positions, advertising, publishing and theatre as well as more conventional educational routes. In many cases this trajectory has given them the opportunity to develop a suite of key transferrable skills.

I actually worked in the police for a couple of years. And then I got a job with Shelter Scotlandmy flatmate at the time was working in television and he knew that they were looking for people in production. (IP.114)

Many respondents described how they ‘fell into’ their first job, rather than it being a conscious career choice: until an opportunity arose, they were largely unaware of production management as a field.

It wasn't until I did a couple weeks of office work experience for a TV company that I realised my interest in production management and how my skills of organisation and people management naturally fitted into the role. (SP.652)

Why people are attracted to production management roles

Our respondents were largely attracted to the work because ‘it seemed like a good fit’ with their skills in organisation and logistics, people management, and problem solving. Other attractive features of the role were working in a creative environment ‘with like-minded people’, working with a team ‘to create something from nothing’, and variety – both from day to day and from project to project with ‘each job presenting a new set of challenges.’

For some, production management offered a greater degree of stability than alternative television roles, with longer contracts and less travel, making it more family friendly. A few had pursued a production management route because they felt they lacked the confidence or the required, often class-based ‘credentials’ to work in editorial.

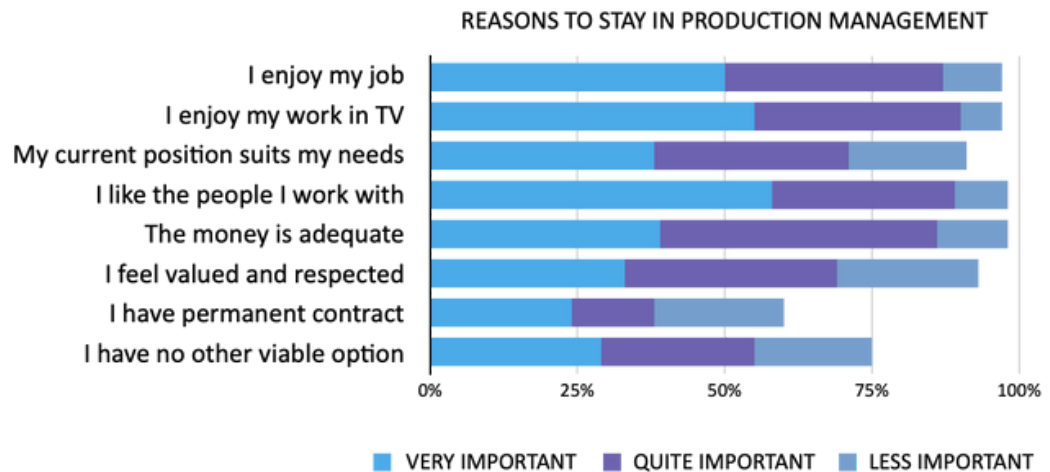
And if I'm honest, when I look back, I think it was a confidence thing and a bit of a demographic thing as well. I think coming from Manchester, you know, I think that was a very Oxbridge kind of [environment] and [I] didn't have the confidence to hold my own in that creative sphere. (IP.27)

However, for most of our participants, in retrospect at least, production management was something of a calling, appealing to a talent for organisation and what one respondent called ‘a sort of innate control-freakery’.

...my brain sort of works that way. Logically, like planning things and putting a shape on chaos... So I think it probably chose me more than I chose it! (IP.249)

Production managers like working in TV

For the most part, our respondents enjoyed their job (87%) and liked working in TV (90%). They told us they like the people they work with (89%) and, in principle, they think the money is adequate (86%), even though the lack of parity with editorial is an issue for many.



I genuinely love production management. Like I love spreadsheets. I love my cost manager. I love, like love budgeting, you know, even though I'm terrible at maths. I love my formulas; I love learning about Movie Magic. I'm wired for production. (IP.161)

Our respondents find great satisfaction in 'bringing a programme in on time and on budget' and also in seeing the final product on screen. They enjoy the challenge of 'organising the impossible' and love facilitating the vision, 'making it happen' for their team. They pride themselves on their people skills and problem-solving skills and on the centrality of their role to the whole production process. They generally experience their job as highly creative, 'just a different kind of creative' to that more usually recognised by their editorial peers.

...there's great variety in this role and it's unpredictable and it's challenging and it uses a lot of those skills around people-skills and problem solving and stuff that gets your brain working, you know, and it is a fantastic career. (IP.447)

On the whole, they found the greatest job satisfaction on projects where they worked in partnership with editorial and where they were involved in a project from commission, ‘all the way through to delivery and post’.

I have been very fortunate.... I've had loads of really great directors and producers who have taken me along the journey and have included and asked for my input on things (IP.110)

It was clear that production management can be a rewarding career on many levels, and our contributors appreciated many positive aspects of their work. Yet the industry continues to experience skills shortages, begging the question as to why it is so difficult to recruit and retain staff in production roles.



The recruitment problem

While TV work in general is aspirational and many roles in the industry are over-subscribed with eager new entrants, it is often difficult to recruit to production management roles. The responses to our survey and interview questions suggested why recruitment remains an ongoing problem.

The invisibility of production management

A significant factor here appears to be a lack of visibility – both to the wider public and within the industry itself. Within the production process, many of our interviewees note, their work often goes unnoticed when it goes well. This invisibility has, until recently, been reflected in the exclusion of PMs from award ceremonies.⁽¹³⁾ Many PMs, for example, were incensed by their omission from the ‘behind the scenes’ film shown at the 2022 BAFTAS.

They did that behind the camera video, and it lists everybody that works behind the camera from, you know, the script supervisor all the way down to the catering or the driver and not a single production role. I think they listed 50 roles, not a single production management role was listed... When even BAFTA don't recognise the department, it's a bit of a kick in the face. (IP.110)

From the point of view of public awareness, however, the omission of PMs from ‘behind the scenes’ segments used in popular entertainment shows such as Strictly Come Dancing (BBC One) or The Great British Bake-off (Channel 4) may be more significant.

When I worked on Strictly Come Dancing, [they'd] do a little skit every week, a little VT about someone who works on the show. So, it'd be like the warm-up guy, and I'm watching what he does. And there would be the music researcher and what they do. There would be the floor manager and what they do.... But you know, they never made a VT about production. Not in all the 20 odd series, they never made a VT about that... (IP.148)

Several participants remarked that the role was overlooked within their education programmes, including some specialist university courses, and in careers resources.

I actually didn't know anything about production management when I was at university; university didn't teach that... Which looking back is quite shocking really. (IP.110)

The image of production management

Where the role is recognised, it is often perceived as less creative and glamorous than other television roles.

[people] just think we're glorified accountants, or we're taxi bookers, or we just do logistics (IP.110)

The importance of production management as the 'lynchpin' of a project is overlooked and there is a general lack of awareness of the creative problem solving that for many PMs constitutes the heart of the role, or the satisfaction that it brings.

to get things done within time constraints within money constraints... requires a lot of creativity. But I don't think that that is recognized as such. (IP.043)

There is a concern, moreover, that, within the industry at least, some of the issues described below, such as a lack of respect, lower pay and the 'always-on' working culture, might deter people from going into this area of work. One respondent, bemoaning the apparently relentless accumulation of extra responsibilities to the role in recent years, noted that 'no one wants to work for us, and I don't blame them'.

Production management needs a re-branding. (SP.759)

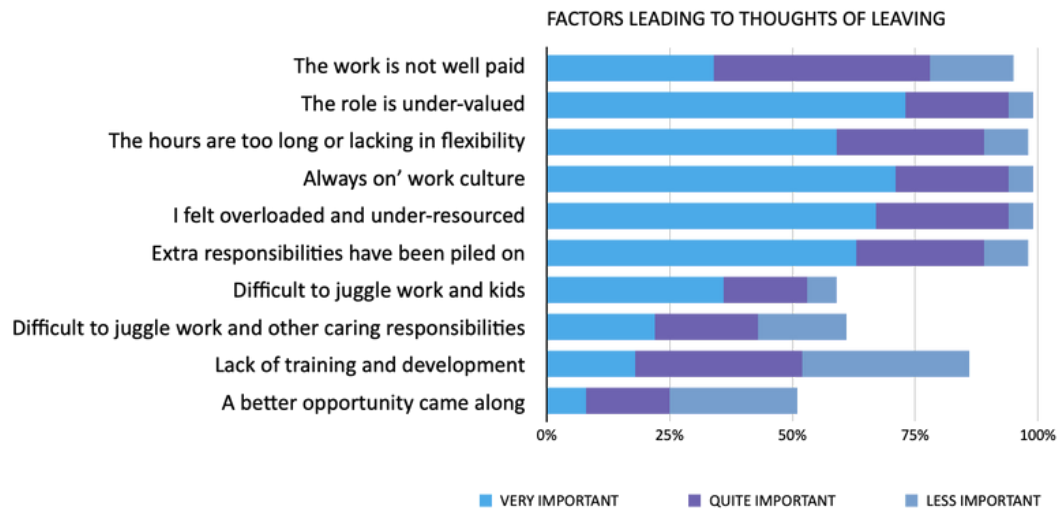
The issues of visibility and image need to be addressed if the industry is to be more successful in recruiting production management roles, and indeed to roles lower on the production career ladder. However, these issues cannot be separated from those that contribute to retention problems, which in turn impact on the image of the role and on maintaining a healthy talent pipeline.



The Retention Problem

Despite the often-rewarding nature of production management work, and the relative stability of employment prospects compared with many other roles, the industry struggles to retain production staff.

Why people seriously consider leaving production management



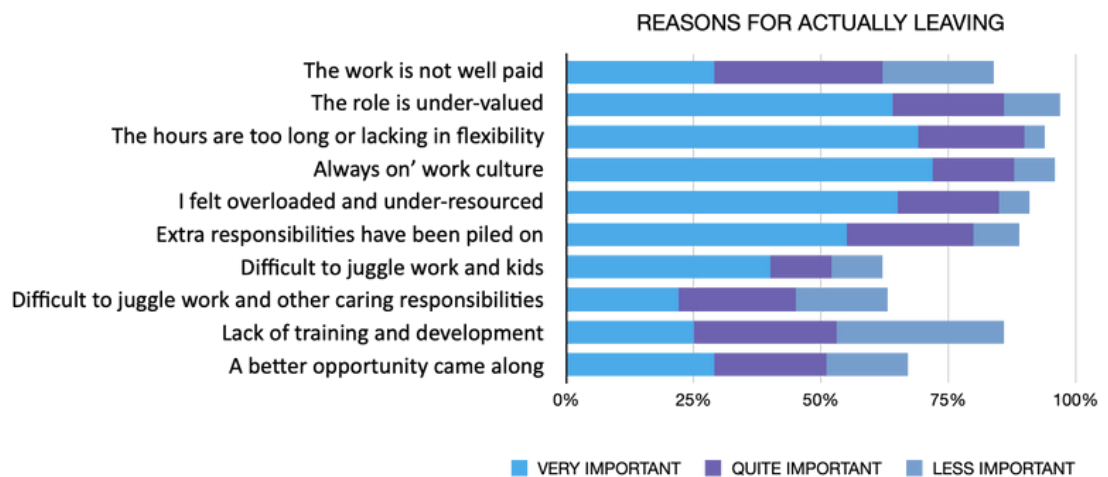
The top three reasons most cited by our respondents as 'very' or 'quite' important are that the role is undervalued or not respected (94%), that there is an 'always-on' work culture (94%) and that they are left feeling over-loaded and under-resourced (94%). The majority felt that hours were too long and too inflexible (89%) and that too many extra responsibilities had been piled onto the role during their time in production (86%).

Working in production management can be a very thankless task. It is very much an 'always-on' culture.... and there is a severe lack of understanding and respect sometimes from editorial colleagues [for] the value of the jobs we do. (SP.546)

Production managers felt that their work went unnoticed or unacknowledged when all went well, but that they were routinely blamed for problems not of their making. Many remarked on a kind of 'mission creep' that had incrementally added responsibilities to their role over the past twenty years without the additional resource to address, or additional compensation to recognise this. These inflated expectations made a healthy work-life balance impossible for many of our respondents.

When programmes go well people think you have just done your job. If programmes go wrong, it is laid at [the] PM's door. PMs are never mentioned when programmes are nominated for awards etc. All this contributes towards making you feel your job is not an important part of the production and that you are disposable. (SP.784)

Why production managers leave



For those participants who have already left production management, the picture was very similar to that set out above. The most cited reason was that the hours are too long or lacking in flexibility (90%), with the 'always on' work culture (87%), the fact that the role is undervalued/not respected (86%) and being over-loaded and under-resourced (86%) coming close behind. Again, most felt that too many extra responsibilities had been added to the role (80%).

Workload is the main issue, partly influenced by budgets and roles being cut, and new initiatives being brought into the industry with the PM team having to pick up many parts of these responsibilities - i.e., contracting, sustainability, health & safety, covid protocols etc (SP.270)

Leavers usually identified a number of contributory factors, but many also identified a 'last straw' that motivated or reinforced their decision. Much of the time this 'last straw' consisted of a display of disregard or disrespect that led the individual to wonder why they continued to tolerate other difficulties or privations.

If I had felt like a valued team member who was respected and developed it would have been very different (SP.085)

Invariably those respondents who had left the industry had been very conflicted about the decision but had felt obliged to find an alternative career in the interests of their family relationships, or their own physical and mental health.

Being in production management sucks the life out of you. It's such a shame as I once loved this job so much. (SP.644)

Key contributory factors

Pay was cited as a factor by 78% who had considered leaving, and 62% of those who had left production. For most people, however, it appeared to be less the absolute level of pay that was the issue, than the lack of parity with editorial, and the fact that rates of pay do not reflect the long hours or the levels of responsibility that characterise these roles.

Salaries are still not commensurate with responsibility, and there is no parity between editorial and production management (SP.544)

Over half of leavers cited the difficulties of juggling childcare and work as a key factor, with 45% citing other caring responsibilities. A lack of flexibility in terms of part-time work, job share and opportunities to work at home had forced many out of a job they loved.

I couldn't see a way in which it would be possible to combine rearing a small child with working in production management. (SP.839)

Limited opportunities for career progression and a lack of training were also contributory factors, particularly for those who left production management for alternative roles in television.

Given the investment and potential represented by each experienced production manager who leaves the role, as well as the human cost represented by the sense of loss that so many leavers feel, it is imperative that we come to a better understanding of the practices and experiences that lie behind the retention problem. This will be the purpose of the next section of this report.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE



This section provides a deeper insight into the day-to-day experiences of production management professionals.

Some of the concerns raised by our participants might be categorised as generic, felt across the industry regardless of role. Previous research, for example, has highlighted the underlying pressures created by commissions that demand too much, in terms of content and production values, for too little, in terms of time and resource.(14) Similarly issues of bullying and toxic work cultures, which had impacted some of our respondents, have been discussed in detail elsewhere.(15)

Other concerns, however, appear to be specific to production management roles or to have a particular inflection in the context of production management. These are divided here into five intersecting and interconnected themes.

- PMs are undervalued, underestimated and under-paid.
- PMs are overloaded, under-resourced and expected to ‘mop up’ extra responsibilities.
- PMs are expected to be ‘always on’, resulting in a poor work-life balance and unhealthy lifestyle.
- There is a gendered dimension to many of the inequities and challenges experienced by PMs.
- There is often a corrosive cultural ‘divide’ between ‘production’ and editorial.

For greater clarity, each of these themes is presented separately below, although their overlapping nature will make for occasional repetition.

Theme 1 – Undervalued, under-estimated and under-paid.

We're often the first in and last to leave yet we are continually overlooked and underpaid. (SP.372).

For most of our respondents, whether still working in production, working elsewhere in television or no longer working in the industry, a key cause of disillusion and demotivation was the lack of respect they encountered, both for their role and for themselves as individuals.

the lack of respect for production is astounding. I think we're seen as completely tradable, you know, ...that there's no skill involved whatsoever. (IP.148)

This was especially demoralising given the expectation on production managers to be, among other things, 'an expert in law / insurance / health and safety' and 'to act as an unofficial HR/ therapist for the team' as well as a facilitator and problem solver across all areas of production.

You know, the number of times I've heard people go 'production management, they look after the money'. No, they don't [just] look after the money, they facilitate in the broadest possible way. (IP.076)

A lack of respect for the production management roles and for the individuals in those roles was demonstrated by the way others spoke to and about them. Respondents described being sworn at and belittled, while their work was routinely dismissed as 'admin' or likened to that of a receptionist: 'anyone can do it, it's just booking a cab'. They were frequently the butt of 'funny jokes' for example about production accountants spending all day painting their nails, or about the fact that PMs 'don't do any real work', are a 'glorified travel agent' or 'just make call sheets that no-one reads anyway'.

I think sometimes the way that you're spoken to can be very dismissive. I think you're sometimes just made to think that it's just like, 'I need this, I want this'. And there's very little consideration over the actual request that's happening. I think you can sometimes feel very unheard... (IP.161)

The informality characteristic of the sector can easily cross over into a lack of professionalism, which in turn can facilitate disrespectful language and attitudes.

people forget that actually... we're at a job, and you still need to treat and speak to people with a lot of respect. And you're not... You know, a lot of us do get to work with our friends. But there's also that professional line that you need to maintain even whilst you're working with your friends that just seems to get crossed a lot. (IP. 66)

The actions of editorial staff, in particular, indicated a lack of appreciation for the role and a lack of respect or consideration for individual PMs, with directors, for example providing information about the next day's shoot so late in the day that the PM is required to work late into the night to prepare. Meanwhile even very junior editorial staff often made it clear that they considered their job, and their time, more important than that of the production staff.

I remember one kid, he was a researcher, and he just would never look at his contract and...., he actually said 'I'm too busy to do this.' And I was thinking, so you're too busy, like your job is so important that you can't do something that like, like, my job is also important. And it's those little undertones of 'I think I'm more important than you cause I'm in editorial'. But I don't even think he realised what he was saying... (IP.118)

Most of our respondents believed that a key reason for the undervaluing of their work was ignorance of their role - a role which, ironically, required them to have a good working knowledge of everyone else's.

a friend of mine is a series director now, he said to me, 'I'm not being funny, but I actually really don't understand what you guys do because you're almost like an enigma. I'm only ever really aware of production management when something goes wrong. (IP.110)

Perhaps as a result of this ignorance, PMs felt that their work went unnoticed or unacknowledged when all went well, but that they were routinely 'thrown under the bus' if anything went wrong, regardless of cause. One participant gave as a typical example 'a flight being cancelled and having multiple people call me to complain'.

Anytime there is an issue, or unhappiness in a team regarding a shoot, it is both your fault and your responsibility to fix. (SP.419)

It was particularly irksome when PMs spent time and resource resolving problems created by others, without a word of appreciation. There was a sense that PMs assumed capacity to 'fix' was taken for granted and fuelled a degree of self-infantilisation or wilful ignorance on the part of some crew members.

[They] called me at four in the morning and said 'Oh, we left the camera at airport security at Gatwick', but didn't realise the whole way, even though it was in their hand... Like that kind of level of stupidity. And I will say it's stupidity because these people are adults, they've done mortgage applications, they've had children, they've gone through life, they feed themselves... So, when they rely so heavily on you to literally hold their hand and at the end of it there is not even a 'thank you so much for sorting that problem out that I created, I really appreciate your time'... (IP.110)

Our respondents insisted that they did not expect 'a constant pat on the back' but the occasional word of thanks would be 'very nice'. One, who had moved on to the (in her view) much simpler and less responsible role of autocue operator, noted that it was 'incredible' how often she was now thanked for her work – something she'd never experienced when pulling 'rabbits out of hats' as a PM.

I think probably 'thank you' actually goes a long way and it costs nothing,... if I've been up all night trying to make sure that when you film tomorrow in the middle of a volcano, you don't fall in and burn to death, or I've put processes in place to make sure that you have all the things you need..... (IP.110)

Meanwhile, in an industry that has long fetishised awards and public recognition, the fact that production management has, until very recently, been omitted from most award nominations clearly rankled, 'making you feel your job is not an important part of the production and that you are disposable.'

I've never heard anyone from production thanked in an awards acceptance speech or seen a member of the production team alongside their creative counterparts at an awards event. Why? (SP.720)

Most of our respondents were more concerned with receiving acknowledgement and basic courtesy from their co-workers; nevertheless, awards have become a symbol of the way in which production is undervalued within the industry.

I know so many people that are leaving because they just had enough. They've had enough of not being given any credit and I don't even mean financial credit. It's just, you know, they were as much part of delivering the production as their executive producer counterpart who goes to the BAFTAs and picks up the award. (IP.023)

Credits were also a point of contention for senior members of the production management team, as the practice of omitting them from title credits seemed to reinforce an endemic disregard for their contribution to the production.



Another example, is on opening credits of high end documentaries... very rarely are Line Producers credited... they may work between 1-2 years on a series, and yet the DOP who worked 3 weeks in total on filming alone will get credited in the opening titles, as will an Editor, a Composer, Producers,... yet the longest running member of that production team was probably the Line Producer who had way more responsibility for the series, and will have been a huge part of the decision making on the series as a whole... (SP.658)

Rates of pay were seen as another indicator of value – or the lack thereof. PMs acknowledged that pay may seem good compared to other industries but felt there was disproportionate pay disparity between production and editorial roles – particularly considering the levels of responsibility assumed by production management. Some respondents had noted improvements, possibly due to recent efforts by Bectu, the entertainment union, to address parity in their guidelines, or possibly in response to skills shortages. Others, however, had seen no positive change.(16)

The issues with pay parity are also something that I know have caused a lot of my colleagues to leave the industry. (SP.005)

Rates are so far behind that of editorial teams - how is a junior producer paid the same as a production manager? Why are we keeping good co-ordinators on the same starting salary of a researcher? (SP.118)

Production Co-ordinators, the work horses of the team, are paid as little as £650 per week. When the hours are calculated, it becomes less than minimum wage. (SP.156)

Finally, our respondents explained how the undervaluing and underestimation of their contribution to production could become detrimental to a project, when PMs or production executives were excluded from the early stages of decision making. Apart from creating tensions across the team, this could result in poor planning, particularly in pre-production, and end up inflating the final costs.

We aren't consulted or involved in creative discussions and sometimes seem to just be machines there to just 'make things happen'. (SP.575)

Our respondents stressed that this lack of respect for their role started 'at the top', with commissioners and executive producers, and thus came to pervade the culture.

I think there's been a whole set of factors which are all coming together to where production management feel undervalued, highly pressurised and not part of the decision making. (IP.076)



I think that when you're completely overburdened and overwhelmed and you're working too hard, then it reflects in your brain as 'and I'm not even paid properly for this'. (IP.449)

This demoralising sense of being undervalued by colleagues and by the wider industry impacts on the individuals themselves, on the industry's capacity to recruit and retain production staff and on the success of individual projects. A widespread tendency to underestimate the contribution of production management staff, moreover, can be a significant factor in the reported overloading of those staff - which in turn increases PMs sense of being taken for granted and under-compensated.

Theme 2 – Overloaded, under-resourced and ‘mopping up’ extra work

If there is nobody to do a job, it falls to the production manager / co-ordinator (SP.118)

Our participants frequently reported feeling overloaded in production roles. For many this was a feeling that had become more pronounced over time as they found it increasingly challenging to meet the demands made upon them. A sense that this was simply unsustainable was often cited by those who had left production management.

Working as a Production Executive just became a very stressful role and finding it harder to contain the anxiety of going to work every day. Was overseeing multiple big series. Deadlines were getting tighter and tighter as were budgets and schedules and there was just never any let up. The demands from above within the company and from broadcasters just seemed more and more unreasonable and [I] decided to make a change and leave the industry. (SP.771)

This overloading was largely ascribed to two factors, both associated with a problematic conjunction of decreased budgets and increased creative expectations. The first of these factors was a move toward ever-tighter production schedules, typically with inadequate pre-production time – an issue cited elsewhere by television professionals working across all departments.(17)

what happens now is they take the pre-production out the budget. What would have been four weeks of planning, so that everybody knew what they were going out the door to make - that's gone. (IP.249)

The second factor was the tendency for whatever budget was available to be siphoned off to other departments, leaving production management significantly under-resourced. This was particularly frustrating given that, PMs with sight of the whole budget, could see exactly what funds were available and where they were being spent.

I was told recently to take a coordinator role out of a budget to keep the cost down so we could spend on the casting team. The production management team was two people and editorial sixteen. (SP.48)

...when asking for help, all I would get as an answer is sorry, we have no money to employ additional help - which is not true as the money was in the budget. (SP.291)

As a result, the remaining production roles would often be merged, with one person undertaking what ‘would usually be two- or three-people’s jobs’, leaving PMs with ‘simply no way to delegate or push back’. Another cost-saving strategy was to employ one PM to support multiple concurrent productions, potentially misrepresenting the budget-line to commissioners. Such overloading could impact on those with staff roles just as severely as it did freelancers.



At one point I think I was a Researcher, a Production Co-ordinator and a Production Manager all in one. Oh, and some of the Ops Manager role because they were over-burdened, too. I was travelling constantly, always in a different time zone and it was exhausting. Shoots were back-to-back and whilst the project roster expanded, the capacity within the team didn't. (SP.691)

Our respondents generally felt themselves to be conscientious workers and good team players, prepared to go 'above and beyond to get things done' but were perturbed when 'the exception became the norm' with people subjected to unreasonable demands on a regular basis.

Production management people are usually a particular kind of breed of person who take responsibility above and beyond and take things seriously... they're normally the kind of person that would not want to let anyone down... So I think employers probably have just traded on goodwill, but they haven't seen that the long-term consequence is that people get burnt out and just ditch it. (IP.077)

In addition to under-resourced teams and conflated roles, production management staff found themselves taking on additional work in response to a variety of pressures both internal and external to individual productions or companies. In common with most roles in television production, production management roles come with 'no specific job descriptions' (18) which facilitated the custom and practice whereby 'any additional things that might crop up throughout production, that we don't have a role for is then passed to production to resolve, cover, handle.' It was assumed that production would 'mop up what everyone else has no time for' although, as one participant plaintively observed, 'there is no one to mop up for us'.

This week alone, I have done archive research, sourced locations, formatted and time-coded the viewing script for the commissioning editor and legal, chased contributors for their release forms that were forgotten on location and the list goes on. Yet none of these jobs are actually part of a PM's job description. (SP.81)

While PMs were used to 'being left to pick up the pieces as they are always the last ones standing on a production' some of our respondents reported being 'fed up' with work created by others 'not doing their jobs properly'. For some, the sense of being taken for granted was visceral:

And it's the - you know, it's the absolute frustration, blood-boiling frustration of getting a car, a minibus back from a shoot and it pulls up outside your office and all of editorial empty out and walk up to the office and all of production are there picking up the kit with the runners to take it back up to the office (IP.148)

Meanwhile it was production management who bore the brunt of picking up the extra work created by external regulations and initiatives. An apparently ever-growing list included everything from new visa requirements, post-Brexit, to regional production quotas, to mental health initiatives.

Every change in regulation means additional paperwork for production management - Covid, equal opportunities, Albert (19) and sustainability, more post-production paperwork, increase in complexity of rights, GDPR etc. Every time it is just added to the production without dedicated resource meaning it ends up in the production management team's remit. (SP.118) (20)



While our respondents acknowledged the positive potential of many new initiatives, they were sceptical about the industry's real commitment to those that seemed to manifest primarily as tick box exercises for production management, without the provision of any additional resources. Meanwhile PMs felt they were left with inadequate time and capacity 'to plan and manage anything' within their core role.

The core parts of our job become marginalised, as yet another form or process somehow becomes ours to deal with. As an example, the existence of Albert suggests that 'being green' is important to the industry but all it really means is an excess of extra data entry and admin work for PCs to do. (SP.53)

An unsustainable workload was a key reason for people leaving production management, and exacerbated people's sense of being undervalued. It also negatively impacted the talent pipeline, as the practice of cutting junior roles, and combining what were once multiple jobs into one, reduced entry routes into production management. There was, moreover, a clear sense that, with burgeoning bureaucracy, and with budgets and schedules increasingly squeezed, the problem was getting worse. Overloading and under-resourcing inevitably led to over-long working hours for production staff, and, together with the 'always-on' work culture, contributed to poor work-life balance and associated health issues.

An unmanageable workload became very stressful, particularly for committed and conscientious individuals, one of whom noted that 'There's nothing that causes more stress than not having enough time to do your job'. This stress impacted our respondents in different ways. One admitted:

I have to be completely honest here, and I'm sure [it's the same for] other people. There has not been one job that I've not cried on, at least once. (IP.099)

For others, there were serious repercussions on their mental health, with several reporting how they had had to leave jobs that induced excessive levels of anxiety through overwork. Typically, they experienced such incidents as failures on their own part, further perpetuating poor health outcomes.

I was neglecting myself far too much. My health really suffered - I was depressed because I constantly felt as though I was failing when actually I was just over-worked and really under appreciated. (SP.691)

Theme 3 – Being ‘always-on’, work-life balance and unhealthy lifestyle.

production management takes over your whole life. (SP.745)

Excessively long working hours are endemic in television, particularly during shoots.⁽²¹⁾ It is unsurprising, then, that given their conscientious mindset and the overloading of their role, production management staff are no exception. Our respondents described their working hours as ‘gruelling’ and ‘horrific’, pointing out that ‘when filming stops, we go back to our desks and do more for the next day’. Due to the nature of the work, moreover, and the fact that those performing it are rarely on set, these hours are often as invisible as the role itself.

I was waking up at six or half six in the morning, was on my phone immediately replying to texts, replying to emails. I’d get to work for half 9:00-ish. Work until midnight in my office, be on my phone doing emails on the journey home. Get home, do a little bit more work that I’ve suddenly thought of and then ... four or five hours of sleep, but in that five hours sleep I was getting up, I was waking up in the middle of it, panicked, worried that I forgot to do something. (IP.074)

A separate issue from the sheer number of hours worked, however, was the assumption that PMs would be ‘always-on’, permanently on-call during the production period. Some were relatively comfortable with providing this free service as part of the role.

I have my phone on 24/7, and if I have a crew out at the weekend, even though I’m not paid or scheduled to work on the weekends, if something goes wrong, or if somebody needs me, I will be on the other end of that phone for them And if I need to log on at the weekend to sort it out, I will (IP.161)

It was clear, however, that this instance of going ‘above and beyond’ contract represented another ‘normalised’ set of expectations and not an individual choice. Despite being unpaid, these additional hours were culturally enforced. They were made an explicit expectation by employers, who would reportedly tell staff ‘You should know there’s no such thing as a day off in this industry’ and in some cases blacklist anyone who resisted this approach. The requirement was also internalised by PMs themselves, despite their reservations, as the only way to stay on top of their workload.

The always-on culture is awful. I’ve been in bed at night whilst receiving WhatsApps that others expect me to reply to. I’ve been in gym classes where I’m having to reply to emails or messages between exercise sets. I’ve woken up with lots of messages to reply to. I wish it were as easy as ‘well just don’t reply!’ But when you’re in the thick of it, you have to. Otherwise, the problem will likely avalanche into a bigger one. (SP.235)

These expectations of 24/7 support were generally shared by the wider crew who also assumed production management would be ‘always available to take a call or fix a problem’ and PMs felt obliged to ‘drop everything to help’, at whatever time of day or night, on the usual basis that ‘there isn’t anyone else’ to do so. At times these requests were not critical, urgent, or even appropriate, making PMs feel that their support was taken for granted. Extreme examples cited by our respondents included a call ‘to tell me their hotel bedside lamp doesn’t work’, another at 3am ‘because somebody’s... pillows weren’t hard enough or too hard or whatever’. One respondent protested that ‘every problem is directed to us, even where it should be taken to the producer.’ Once again it was the fact that these expectations were reflected neither in pay nor in any other indicator of value that rankled with our respondents.

It is incredibly disheartening to be one of the people who has to be constantly available to solve issues, even as a junior role, while simultaneously knowing you are getting paid significantly less than your editorial counterparts (SP.419)

The 'always-on' culture, whether manifested in the expectation of employers or our respondents' expectations of themselves, made it almost impossible to achieve any kind of work-life balance.

It's difficult to 'switch off' and you're expected to be on call all the time, you have to install boundaries but then feel like you're shirking when you do so. (SP.764)

Some respondents had had a degree of success at setting boundaries, for example by refusing to look at emails out of working hours. One suggested that PMs be issued with a work phone which 'would help create a boundary, and would mean we could switch off the work phone.' Most however, found that 'the pressure to respond at ridiculous times of the night is very much there and on some productions there's no escape'. This was particularly true of international productions, where, for example, the crew might be shooting in a different time zone. At the end of the day, most PMs working for employers with insufficient budget (or insufficient empathy) to employ a production management team working shifts, were resigned to the privations associated with such shows.

It's a 24/7 gig. Particularly if you're working on a shoot from the UK that are filming in Canada, who are eight hours behind. There is no rest. You are waking up to emails in the middle of the night. Sometimes phone calls and you just get on with it. You just do it, because that's kind of, you know. Rightly or wrongly, you just feel like it's part of the job. (IP.138)

While our respondents often found great job satisfaction in coordinating large scale, logistically complex shows like this, and in their responsibility for 'making it happen' against the odds, they also recognised that the 'always-on' culture and lack of work-life balance amounted to 'highly unhealthy way to live'.

You know we don't all have the best diets. We don't all exercise, because there's just no time, and there's no energy. You're always tired, you don't want to exercise. Yeah, I think as well when you're working so late as well, especially if you're coming home from an office. You're going to go and pick something up because you don't want to cook. (IP.066)

While concerns for their physical health were often expressed, both in terms of short-term impact such as weight gain and in terms of longer-term effects such as chronic back pain, it was the toll on their mental health that our respondents cited most frequently as an outcome of excessive working hours and the concomitant lack of work-life balance. Especially demanding contracts 'where you are working from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to bed' were described by one participant as 'traumatising'. But perhaps even more concerning was the routine impact of the 'always-on' culture on many PMs.

I know a lot of people who, you know, they finish a job and this constant straight state of, you know, alertness doesn't stop. And that is when it's very dangerous. And that's where you end up, you know, going into a situation where, you can't sleep or, you know, all these things. (IP.099)

One respondent was concerned for the longer-term impact of the prevailing working patterns on individuals who are currently oblivious to the danger.

A lot of people I know in the industry are very positive and resilient but, I think a lot of the time it can impact people without them realising or they'll get five or ten years in their career and just realise they're quite exhausted from all of it (IP.375)

For another the hidden nature of the problem was exemplified by her high-performing colleague.

I said you're incredible. You're across all the compliance, all the testing, you know you've got some junior people on the crew, you're across all of what they're doing'. I said, 'how do you do it?!' And she says: 'I drink too much and I'm not sleeping!' But you would never ever have known that. (IP.204)

Yet another provided an illustration of this concern from her own experience, finding that the lifestyle was becoming unsustainable. This individual represents precisely the kind of highly experienced, highly skilled PM the industry can ill afford to lose.

As I age in the industry (I am only 46 btw) I already feel I don't have capacity anymore. It eats you up and spits you out fast. For the first time this year I had to leave a job through mental and physical exhaustion. (SP.644)



On the whole, PMs accept that the job encompasses an out-of-hours, emergency back-up element. They are somewhat aggrieved, however, that their efforts in this respect are unrecognised and unpaid, and that, possibly as a result, abused by some colleagues. It is also clear that there are limits on what can reasonably expected from hard-working professionals, beyond which there are serious consequences for people's health and well-being.

Theme 4 - Gendered inequities and challenges

The role is... under-paid and under-valued as it is dominated by female employees. This makes it very soul destroying. (SP.544)

As has been noted elsewhere, there is a clear connection between the feminisation of particular roles in film and television production and the fact that those same roles tend to be underpaid and undervalued, with the creativity involved underestimated by contemporaries and historians alike.(22) Whether roles are undervalued and underpaid because they are typically performed by women or the other way about, a similar association is to be found in other industries.(23) In relation to production management specifically, the persistence of such dated correlations was highlighted by several of our respondents, as was the associated tendency of women to under-value their own contribution.

But you know usually it's like, yeah, ...it's a bit like the nurses, it's because it's a female dominated role is that it's - it's almost like being a mother... You make it look easy but actually there's so much that goes into it. And all the women that I know that are so amazing, they don't even realise they're amazing. They don't even realise just the amount of plates they're spinning - the amount of hats that they're having to wear! (IP.204)

Pay disparity was often represented as a gendered issue, on the one hand reflecting a wider context in which 'men obviously normally get paid more than women', and on the other a lack of confidence in many women to ask for what they are worth.

I think it's not much of a surprise that production management is a predominantly female department, and it is less well paid than editorial, which is a predominantly male department.... it doesn't take a genius to work that one out. (IP.110)

The broader issue of undervaluing and underestimating PMs also has a gendered dimension. One respondent described the challenge they, and other women, often face of having to work harder than their male colleagues to have their voices heard and their input taken seriously:

I go into a meeting having to put on a bit of an armour, because I have to make sure that people listen to me... You know, people take me seriously, but it takes a while. I can't just walk in, and [just] like that people listen to me. That exhausts me.... and I see it with a lot of other women... I mean women who are more senior than me who don't get taken seriously. (IP.099)

It is, perhaps, to be expected that a female-dominated role will lack respect in a working environment where sexist attitudes and language are not only perpetrated but tolerated and normalised.

I had a male director say, when I was asking about some green screen stuff... 'oh, don't you worry your pretty little head about it' - which is what he actually says to me. When I complained about that to the series producer, who's female, it was just shrugged off. It's like, 'Oh, it's fine. He's just very old school'... And I just thought, it's just so degrading to be spoken to like that in front of a room full of people and for it... not to be addressed. (IP.066)

Gender was also considered a factor in the tendency to treat PMs as secretaries and surrogate mothers. While many PMs enjoyed the caring aspect of the job and took pride in their capacity to support the well-being of the team, they saw in many of their colleagues an inappropriate dependency on, and abnegation of responsibility to, the (predominantly female) production management team.

I find it challenging sometimes that people, I think probably because it's always predominantly been women that work in production, ...there's almost like this, like kind of responsibility almost like a mothering role. Like, I should be responsible for somebody, you know. And I think, well, we're all adults here and, you know, it's... I find it sometimes really frustrating. (IP.114)

Actual motherhood, moreover, brought a range of challenges for many PMs – some of which proved insuperable. Parenting, along with other caring responsibilities in family life, continues to fall disproportionately on women, and is thus a critical factor for a department where a high proportion of experienced professionals are women in their late thirties and forties. Unlike other sectors that rely heavily on this demographic, the television industry has yet to adapt to this fact. Thus, the material challenges of reconciling family and work obligations are exacerbated by a culture that still treats working mothers as anomalous.

I often feel that I'm asking for favours when I start a contract. And then you have to be very grateful when someone makes an accommodation. Even if they're a very inclusive workplace, it's still an accommodation. It's not a standard practice. So then, if anything should happen, or if you have a different change in circumstance, you already feel that you've asked the favour that you need to ask. And I think particularly for women, that can feel very challenging, because lots of men I know in the industry have a partner who does do the childcare at home. (IP.375)

Our respondents felt that women (as opposed to men) were 'judged if you have childcare commitments' and that employers were inclined to 'turn their nose up' at midwife appointments, making new mothers pessimistic about their chances of securing flexible working arrangements after having their baby. Many of our younger respondents considered these attitudes, and a culture that normalised them, shockingly antediluvian.

series and exec producers openly comment on being pissed-off that parents need to leave at certain times to tend to their children... it's 2023! (SP.562)

On a practical front, for many, the combination of excessively long hours and unpredictable work patterns made it 'impossible to juggle working and be a primary caregiver'.

I am the primary caregiver to my son (my husband works away) so I have had to fight to work simply my contracted hours, and even then, I've had to turn jobs down that aren't compatible with a normal working life. (SP.077)

Meanwhile the 'always-on' culture was simply 'not compatible with raising small children'.

I feel like when I get home, I want to focus on my kids rather being glued to my phone and feeling the need to be available for work. (SP.89)

Many sought to resolve these difficulties by seeking part-time work, job-share or other flexible arrangements. Unfortunately, the industry, despite demanding almost infinite flexibility of its staff, provides very few reciprocal opportunities. For many working in production management this meant they had to leave the industry, at least temporarily.

When I had my eldest daughter, I couldn't get a part time or flexible work-from-home job at all. This was in 2013. So [I] had to step out of the industry for a while. (SP.154)

Where PMs were able to find part-time opportunities, it was not unusual for these roles to expand until it was only the pay that was 'part-time'.

they sort of said to me, OK, we'll sort you out a nice three-day-a-week job working on a little documentary. It's like, oh, great, I'll do that. Yeah. Perfect. And then it turned into three days a week, but maybe pick up your emails on a Monday or Friday, and can you also please look after post-production on [a prime-time factual entertainment show] and can you please... and it started growing and growing? (IP.148)

Both those production staff who found ways to stay in the industry while their children were young, and those who took a career break, often reported a negative impact on their career progression.

[I] took eight years out of the industry as a PC to look after young children and found it daunting to re-enter television due to low confidence and feeling that technology had moved on too far. Starting back in the industry, I took a lower grade role and worked back up. (SP.376)

I've been struggling to find a part time Production Manager role; I've even started to look at PC roles if it allows me to work part time. (SP.786)

Many, reluctantly, took the decision to leave the television industry entirely, taking their experience and skills set elsewhere.

I wanted to stay in TV but wanted babies. I could not move around and there was not enough locally and paying for childcare is not an ad hoc thing. It's such a shame as I loved my job. (SP.193)

The message to younger women is not positive, with many reporting a concern that production management just won't afford them the flexibility they will need to start a family.

work-life balance is so hard to achieve in this industry.... so throw kids into the mix... I don't want to think about it. (SP.612)

Our data suggests that gender is a contributory factor towards the professional inequities experienced by many of our respondents, with sexist attitudes, whether explicit or implicit, reinforcing the lack of respect afforded production management staff. The feminisation of production work may also be implicated in the cultural divide discussed below. Meanwhile the lack of practical support or understanding for family commitments, which fall disproportionately on women, mean that parenthood feeds into the brain-drain of just those people (experienced PMs in their thirties and forties) the industry most needs to retain. Women who leave, whether temporarily or permanently, or who deliberately 'down-grade' represent a significant contribution to the skills gap - one the industry can ill afford.

Theme 5 – The corrosive production/ editorial divide

Production Management is like being in an abusive relationship with Editorial. (SP.681)

A final, and unanticipated, theme that emerged powerfully from our research was that of a structural and cultural divide between production and editorial teams which has materialised (or at least worsened) over the past twenty years, with older PMs recalling a time when they were far more involved in the editorial process.

Production Managers used to be considered the pivotal person between producers and production AND cast and writers. They were in the middle of everything and had a small team to support them. Now they do everything without help and no-one seems to think they need to be included in editorial matters. (SP.327)

This divide seems to be at the heart of many of the issues that concern our respondents, having a corrosive effect on working relationships and obstructing the effective conduct of production projects. It often imbues production cultures such that junior editorial staff are effectively taught to disrespect production from an early stage and thus to perpetuate a divided and divisive culture. While by no means ubiquitous, this divide is prevalent across the sector and is characterised by a power imbalance that recalls something of the gendered dynamic discussed above.



It's frustrating how hard I have to work in order to have a good relationship with other people and they don't work anywhere near as hard to have a good relationship with me. But I need to keep it going because, at the end of the day, I want to steer them in the direction that makes sense. (IP.161)

Our respondents observed that editorial teams lean heavily on production, while simultaneously undervaluing their skills. It was not unusual to find themselves treated as personal assistants, with Series Producers' out-of-office replies, for example, 'regularly directed to the PM rather than to their teams' Producers.'

We're seen as responsible and safe plate catchers, there to chase and remind endlessly and ensure that we just meet that deadline [and yet] there's little respect for the skills we have. (SP.197)

The lower status ascribed to production by editorial staff in particular, and the correspondingly dismissive attitude adopted by many, was especially noticeable to one respondent who 'having started my life in tv as a researcher... saw the immediate difference when I changed to production management'.

a lot of the editorial counterparts I have worked with simply don't believe we are on a similar status - this is shown with the way they talk and act on production and the lack of value they place in our roles and knowledge. This is not applicable to all editorial staff of course but still far too many. It's tiring and frustrating. (SP.644)

Senior editorial staff too often demonstrated a lack of professional respect that reinforced the cultural divide and set a poor example for their teams.

And we were about to have a massive, massive, massive day of filming and obviously, you know, it's quite a big deal. But one of the contributors was in A&E for an allergic reaction.... They got there without informing me. They sat there without informing me. They were treated without seeing me. [Then the Series Producer] called me to book a taxi to get them out of there!and we were about to do like an 18-hour day. My alarm was going to go off at 5:30, but they called me at 4:15 to book a taxi. And it's like, you know, ... I mean, that person was a particular case in point of genuinely believing that production was sub-human, but, you know, that behaviour was also seen by other people and not stopped.... and younger members of the team saw that behaviour and probably thought it was fully appropriate. (IP.148)

For our respondents, this divide was expressed in (and reinforced by) what amounted to unprofessional and destructive attitudes and behaviours. These included regular failures in communication.

a plan changing that doesn't get communicated to you or something, and then you have to scramble to fix it... As long as the communication is there, anything can be sorted out, but if there's a breakdown in communication, that can generally cause the most tension between editorial and production. (IP.375)

The unfair allocation of blame and the general lack of support were other symptoms of the divide.

Mistakes coming from a PM are always unacceptable while the editorial team is allowed to make them (and the production management teams usually are there to fix their mistakes). (SP.291)

[We have] ultimate responsibility for programme finance and management but little support from senior editorial and also channel financiers. (SP.226)

Our respondents suggested that the cultural divide was in part attributable to a 'historic prejudice that because we aren't the "creatives" that our roles are meaningless.'

Maybe it's because people see... production management as like a non-creative role that's very kind of logistics. But actually, like, it is creative. It's creative in its own way. Because you have to figure out stuff, you know. You're given a brief, and you actually need to turn that into a reality. (IP.138)

In addition to general ignorance about the role, moreover, working protocols and structures sometimes pitted editorial and production against one another such that editorial staff perceived production input as negative.

I think there is a common misconception that the PM team do not add value to what is on screen, only that they put restrictions on editorial teams' aims. (SP777)

One respondent explained how a lack of mutual understanding tended to fuel a situation whereby 'a lot of times it feels like production and editorial are kind of like fighting each other':

People in production get very frustrated with the editorial side of things. I think [editorial] can sometimes tend to not fully understand... all of the other like box ticking that we sometimes have to go through [to facilitate shoots]. And at the end of the day, whether we agree with the box ticking or not, it's part of our job... So I think sometimes with production, they can get frustrated at that and then they can like flex their muscle and then they can tend to say no to things when they could be a yes. And then I think that generally then creates frustration on the director's side...And I think a lot of people come across as arrogant on that side, but it's just a way that they're protecting their vision essentially... So I think, you know, it can be a bit of a back and forth sometimes. (IP.161)

It was clear that, given a positive partnership with editorial colleagues, our respondents took great satisfaction from facilitating a creative vision. Ultimately, however, a lack of clarity in job definitions or formalised working relationships meant that the nature of the partnership between editorial and production, like the role of production management itself, was extremely variable from project to project and highly dependent on the attitude of editorial staff.

There's no uniformity, there's no rules. It's like the Wild West. (IP.439)



By its very nature the 'divide' between editorial and production may be difficult to pin down and thus difficult to address. However, it clearly has considerable negative impact, and is implicated to a greater or lesser extent in all the other themes discussed in this report. It seems reasonable to assume that by taking steps to address this issue, the industry might go some way to address others. Even where resources remain tight, the respect and understanding of editorial staff, alongside a more collaborative working partnership between editorial and production departments, could go a long way to resolving many of PMs' key concerns and thus towards addressing the skills gap.

CONCLUSION: TIME FOR A CHANGE

I am passionate about making telly, I don't want to leave I want to be a part of the change. (SP. 042)

Production management is a crucial element of television production and can offer a highly rewarding career. Nevertheless, the television industry experiences perennial issues with recruitment and retention in this area, leading to significant skills shortages over the long term. The current slowdown in commissioning is likely to exacerbate the problem, as more and more experienced PMs take their very transferable skills elsewhere, while cuts to junior roles disrupt the talent pipeline. The experiences of our respondents, both those currently working in production management and those who have made the decision to leave, provide insights into some of the reasons behind the skills gaps. They throw light, moreover, on some of the tensions and inefficiencies that can plague productions, as well as showing the toll production management work can take on the well-being and prospects of individuals.

They demonstrate how and why PMs routinely find themselves overloaded and under-resourced, expected to absorb an apparently endless list of additional responsibilities and to make themselves permanently available, and unable to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Critically they demonstrate how and why PMs and those in associated roles come to feel undervalued, too often lacking the appreciation and respect that might make these privations tolerable. Our analysis confirms a notably gendered dimension both to the practical problems many PMs encounter in reconciling their work and home lives, and to the attitudes and assumptions they encounter in their fellow professionals.

It also lays bare a pernicious structural and cultural divide which has developed between editorial and production which seems to be implicated in all these concerns.

Production management needs to be recognised as 'as important as any other job within the industry', with this recognition reflected not only in pay and conditions but also in the day-to-day work environment.

Our research has uncovered many examples of positive working practices and effective working relationships. Since embarking on this project, moreover, we have seen a number of encouraging developments, including the inclusion of production management in industry awards, the introduction of family-friendly policies and flexible working arrangements by some employers and a degree of success in organised lobbying for pay parity. There are many PMs and Head of Production, moreover, dedicated to improving working practices. All of this offers grounds for optimism.

There is still much to be done, however, before the industry can be satisfied that production management is recognised and understood both within and beyond the industry, that PMs are treated equitably and with due respect, that employers are able to recruit and retain the workforce they need. This cannot be achieved without addressing ingrained working culture and practices. As one of our respondents put it, 'it's not rocket science!'. Nevertheless, the challenge this represents for the wider industry should not be underestimated.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issues outlined above, action needs to be taken by a broad range of stakeholders and decision makers.

- **Job definitions:** employers need to ensure that job description and contracts are adopted that reflect an appropriate range of responsibilities for production management roles, drawing on the guidance provided by support organisations (Bectu, BFI, Screenskills).
- **Rates of pay:** employers need to ensure that production management staff are hired at equitable rates reflecting their seniority and responsibilities and in accordance with Bectu guidelines.
- **Production budgets:** commissioners and executive producers need to recognise the production management requirements of each project and make realistic provision in terms of teams and rates.
- **Informed planning and decision-making:** production executives and/or heads of production need to be involved wherever possible in the early planning and decision making that shapes a company's approach to working practices and the distribution of resources.
- **Public recognition:** organisations involved in the sponsorship and provision of industry awards, need to ensure production management is appropriately represented in the categories available for nomination. Press releases and opening credits should likewise recognise the contribution of senior production, in line with senior editorial staff.
- **Career advice and education:** screen educators and careers advisers at all levels need to raise the profile of production managers and promote the career opportunities available in production management.
- **Training and development:** employers and support organisations need to provide accessible and affordable training and development opportunities for professionals at all stages of the production management talent pipeline, including returners.
- **Family-friendly policies:** employers, as well as support organisations, need to embrace and promote a range of family-friendly strategies and initiatives including part-time work, job-share and training for those returning to production management after a career break.
- **Raising awareness:** Employers, talent managers and organisations involved in supporting new entrants across all departments need to facilitate a broad working understanding of the full range of roles and expertise involved in making film and television, providing a variety of cross-departmental experiences wherever possible.
- **Working culture:** employers and their senior staff in all departments need to model, promote and enable a positive working culture that embraces dignity and diversity and adopt positive working partnerships that recognise and value the input of all team members. Bullying and harassment, including sexism and disrespect for family commitments, must not be tolerated or facilitated.
- **Management training and development:** managers and leaders at all levels need to receive appropriate training and support in order to recognise and implement good leadership practices that encompass and promote equitable treatment, support and respect at work for all.

ENDNOTES

- (1) Statista (2024). Revenue of the film industry in the United Kingdom (UK) from 1995 to 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/239187/film-industry-revenue-in-the-uk/>.
- (2) Statista (2024). Employment in the film industry in the United Kingdom from 2007 to 2021, by segment. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/239211/employment-in-the-film-industry-in-the-uk/>.
- (3) ScreenSkills. (2022). Unscripted TV production in the UK: 2021 skills review. <https://www.screenskills.com/industry/research/>. p.8
- (4) ScreenSkills. (2022). Scripted Production: assessment of skills shortages and gaps in the UK nations and regions. <https://www.screenskills.com/industry/research/>. P.23-24.
- (5) SceenSkills. (2022). High-end television in the UK 2021-2022 workforce research. <https://www.screenskills.com/industry/research/>, p.14
- (6) SceenSkills. (2022). High-end television in the UK 2021-2022 workforce research. <https://www.screenskills.com/industry/research/> p.11-12.
- (7) ScreenSkills. (2022). Unscripted TV production in the UK: 2021 skills review. <https://www.screenskills.com/industry/research/>. p.10
- (8) Most recently the £1 million 'PM Skills Fund' launched in May 2022 by in Channel 4, Paramount and UKTV.
- (9) An industry-led survey entitled 'Production is Broken' was launched the previous year, culminating in a report published in February 2023 <https://productionisbroken.co.uk/>. This covered some of the same ground, with similar results in common areas.
- (10) For a full breakdown of demographic profile and multiple choice responses, see the Appendix to this report <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/39530/>
- (11) These stakeholders included experienced production managers as well as heads of production, producers, talent managers and representatives of support organisations.
- (12) See van Raalte, C., Wallis, R., & Pekalski, D. (2021). State of Play 2021: Management practices in UK unscripted television. <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/35897/>.
- (13) This is gradually changing with production management being recognised at award ceremonies by WFTV in 2021 and by both BAFTA and the RTS in 2022 although still be listed as a production category by BAFTA at time of writing.
- (14) See van Raalte, C., Wallis, R., & Pekalski, D. (2021). State of Play 2021: Management practices in UK unscripted television. <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/35897/>, p.30.

(15) For example van Raalte, C., Wallis, R., & Pekalski, D. (2023). More than just a few 'bad apples': the need for a risk management approach to the problem of workplace bullying in the UK's television industry. *Creative Industries Journal*, 1-18.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17510694.2023.2182101>; Bull, A (2023). Safe to speak up? Sexual harassment in the UK film and television industry since #MeToo.

<https://xrstories.co.uk/publication/safe-to-speak-up-sexual-harassment-in-the-uk-film-and-television-industry/>

(16) Bectu. (2022). Bectu launches rate guidance for unscripted branch.

<https://bectu.org.uk/news/bectu-launches-rate-guidance-for-unscripted-branch>.

(17) See van Raalte, C., Wallis, R., & Pekalski, D. (2021). State of Play 2021: Management practices in UK unscripted television. <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/35897/>. p.22-23.

(18) ScreenSkills provides skills checklists for production management roles at various levels <https://www.screenskills.com/skills-checklists/>, however these have yet to be endorsed by key support organisations (such as Bectu and PACT) or adopted by employers to formulate contractual job descriptions. It should also be noted that overviews are extremely broad, (e.g. 'The production manager has overall responsibility for the practicalities of running a production.') and the lists of 'core responsibilities' considerably longer than those supplied for other roles, reinforcing the 'all-encompassing' and potentially overwhelming nature of the PM role.

(19) Albert is a scheme designed to improve sustainability in the film and television industries, supported by BAFTA. To obtain Albert certification, a production company must complete a carbon action plan, using a bespoke carbon calculator.

(20) Some HETV productions have recruited sustainability co-ordinators and, during the pandemic, Covid supervisors. In the majority of cases, however, such responsibilities are absorbed by the production management team.

(21) See Swords, J., Mayne, L., Boardman, C., & Ozimek, A. (2022). The Time Project: Understanding working time in the UK television industry. <https://screen-network.org.uk/publication/the-time-project-understanding-working-time-in-the-uk-television-industry/>, p6.

(22) Hill, E. (2016) *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production*. Rutgers University Press, pp164-5. Hill notes that historically, work perceived as of lower status (in particular work regarded as less creative and associated with detail, service and emotional labour) was deemed the province of female workers, while, conversely, work taken over by women (for example roles which, at the end of the studio system, became less attractive to men due to lower wages and diminished job security etc) shifted to fit that same cultural model of what women's work should look like. Thus roles predominantly performed by women, have remained 'underpaid, underestimated and undercredited' in the industry.

(23) For example Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & society*, 4(2), 139-158. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/089124390004002002>.

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