

HOW TO MAKE FLEXIBLE WORKING WORK WITHIN THE FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY





CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Executive summary	5
Methodology	6
Common models for the working day	7
Flexible working in the context of the Scottish film industry	8
Drivers for wanting to work flexibly	9
Barriers to flexible working	10
How crew experience the lack of flexibility	12
Tactical opportunities and enablers for change	13
Strategic opportunities	15
Recommendations	17
Conclusions	19



Timewise is a social enterprise with commercial expertise and a clear goal: to make flexible working work for everyone.

Through our work with employers, candidates, policymakers, labour market influencers and funders, we're creating stronger, more inclusive workplaces, powered by flexible working.

CONTACT US ON **0207 633 4444**

Timewise Solutions Limited is a limited company registered in England and Wales. Company number: 08795991

©Timewise 2023



BECTU Vision deliver short courses and a drama training programme of activity to support the skills development of crew in Scotland. BECTU Vision is supported by Screen Scotland, BBC and Scottish Union Learning in partnership with Bectu.

CONTACT US AT vision@bectu.org.uk



INTRODUCTION



The film and television industry has some of the longest working hours in the UK. They are in place systemically across productions, rather than just being used to cope with emergencies or peak periods. These long hours are becoming unsustainable for crew members, with 86% of people in film and television experiencing mental ill-health¹.

The situation is creating a crisis for talent retention and also presents challenges to building a diverse workforce including older workers and those with caring responsibilities or health issues². In particular, it leads to gender imbalance in mid-career and senior roles – just 14% of women who work in the sector are parents, compared to 38% in the UK's labour force³.

Record (and still growing) spend on scripted production is compounding the problem. Combined UK production spend on film and high-end TV (HETV) was £5.64 billion in 2021, £2.19 billion (63%) more than in 2017⁴.

So the need for a skilled crew base is greater than ever. It is estimated that continued film and HETV production growth will require between 15,130 and 20,770 additional full-time equivalent employees by 2025. Input from across the production ecosystem is needed to address this, along with an uplift in investment in skills and training within a reinvigorated overall skills strategy⁵.

Attracting new entrants is essential to the growth of a diverse screen sector. However, gaining experience takes time and a more immediate solution to increasing the crew base is to concurrently address the challenges of retaining experienced crew.

Talent shortages and increased demand for productions are creating a perfect storm for production companies, with implications both commercially and for crew themselves. Crew pay rates have risen, the cost of which is having to be absorbed into current commissioning budgets. And the need for crew has led to younger talent climbing the production ladder too quickly, which can be detrimental to their mental health⁶.

There is already recognition amongst industry bodies that these challenges need addressing, from research into wellbeing to programmes focused on skills and training for new entrants. However, there has been less focus on looking at the extent to which improving the industry's working patterns could help. Greater use of flexible working could provide crew with more input into how they work, and enable a reduction in the long hours culture. And this could help production companies to retain and attract talent, and support their wellbeing, in a way that is commercially viable.

BECTU Vision had already been scoping the viability of job sharing through their 'Take Two' initiative, when in spring 2022 they came together with Timewise (the social enterprise and flexible working specialists) to further fill the gap in knowledge. The result was a six month action research project made possible with the support and backing of Screen Scotland.

With a focus on scripted drama productions in Scotland, the project sought to explore the barriers and identify potential opportunities to improve flexible working within the film and television industry.

Within the drama genre, the production industry is shifting to include an emerging medium of streamer drama production alongside the traditional Continuous Drama Series (CDS) and broadcast dramas on terrestrial TV. The traditional models provide a more stable environment to foster new young talent, so this shift in production type strengthens the need to look for flexible working models that can provide sustainable ways of working across all production types.

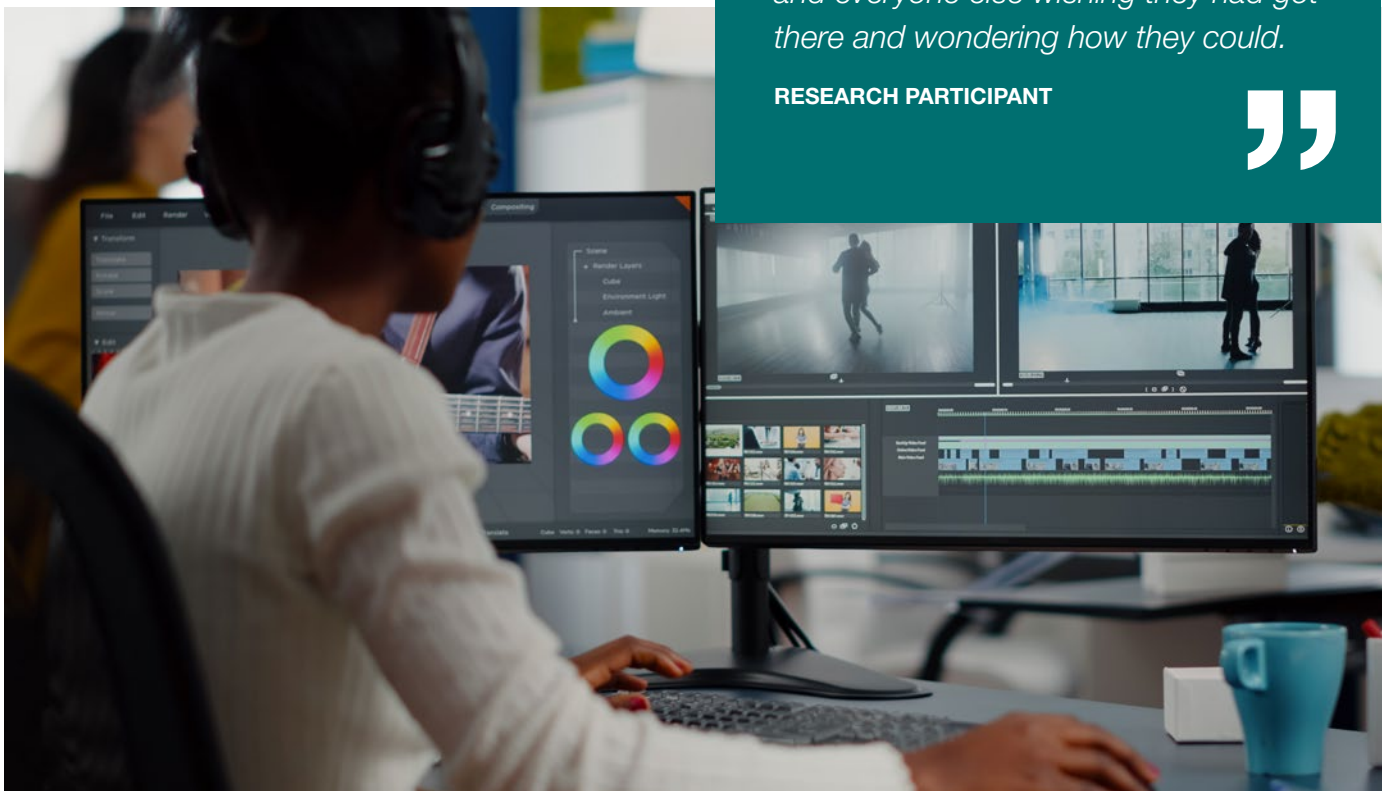
This report summarises the findings of our investigative project, assesses the implications and provides a set of recommendations for action.

“

It would only take one production to announce they are going to work differently, and all the crew will jump at the chance. You'd probably see the best of the best moving to that production, and everyone else wishing they had got there and wondering how they could.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

”



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The long hours' culture in film and television is known to cause problems for mental health and wellbeing and also for talent retention (especially for women in mid-career). The recent rapid growth of the industry is heaping on additional pressure, leading to acute skills shortages with crew working back to back on productions. The situation is acknowledged to be unsustainable.

Greater use of flexible working could potentially ease the pressure on crew, and help production companies to support wellbeing in a way that is commercially viable. This report summarises the findings of a six month action research project in four scripted drama productions in Scotland. The project sought to explore the case for flexible working and identify potential opportunities for improvement.

KEY INSIGHTS

- The barriers and constraints to flexible working in production are familiar to industry leaders. Many are very real, and outside the control of production teams. But a few could potentially be tackled, in particular rushed commissioning meaning that scripts go into production before they are ready, causing delays that lead to even longer hours; and, critically, the assumption that the standard 11-hours is the best model for the working day, even though there appears to be no documented evidence for this.
- Despite the barriers, our conversations with leaders and crew highlighted examples where flexibility is already in place successfully. A consistent feature of these was having a leader who embraced flexibility, often because they wanted to work flexibly themselves or had prior experience of managing a flexible team. This suggests that training and guidance will be needed to extend the acceptance and use of flex more widely across teams.
- Specific examples where flexibility has been implemented successfully include:
 - o The pandemic opening up opportunities for many in pre- and post-production to work in a hybrid way, as some tasks can be done from home.
 - o For some types of roles (eg art department, costume and make-up), the long working day can be covered in smaller chunks of work for individual crew, through job shares, part-time working or split shifts.
 - o Job splits can also be used to support training and mentoring in roles such as the Line Producer, by having a senior and more junior person work alongside each other, working reduced hours and splitting the tasks according to their experience level.
- But for most crew, especially on set, flexible working will essentially require a reduction in the length of the standard 11-hour day. The majority of crew and producers we spoke to were of the belief that this is the way to fundamentally change the industry, increase retention and minimise burn out.
- However, leaders in the industry are nervous about change because of the tension between hours and pay. If production time (and pay) were spread over a longer period, they fear crew would opt to work on other jobs for 'quicker cash'. Yet on the contrary, the majority of crew we interviewed during the research welcomed the idea of shorter days and talked of their fear of not being offered jobs if they expressed a wish to work flexibly. Clearer evidence of the truth of the matter is needed.
- Interviewees highlighted that, although there are examples of flexible working in the industry, little has been documented and shared. Greater transparency is needed through case studies and guidance. Having role models of success is vital to improve general acceptance of flexible working, and would give those who want flexibility the confidence to ask for it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an opportunity for all production companies to build on the positive examples that already exist, and trial some of the tactical options for flexible working highlighted in this research. However, at a wider industry level, we make the following recommendations for Screen Scotland to lead on:

- Work with production companies to document good practice and codify what makes it work, so that it can be replicated in other productions.
- Disseminate a series of case studies and convene production leaders through webinars, to facilitate wider knowledge sharing and incentivise further action on flexible working.
- Work with production companies to train flexible working champions who can identify scope for flexibility in schedules and working patterns, and advocate for change.
- Consider using training budgets to trial flexible working interventions as a means to support new entrants into the industry, attract returners and enable mentoring from experienced crew. For example, piloting job splits between senior and junior crew roles to support career progression.
- Make it a requirement that productions which receive public funding undertake training in flexible working, and actively consider trialling job share or job split opportunities where possible.
- Commission wider research to further evidence the latent demand for flexibility (including for a shorter working day), and the extent to which the lack of flex is a key driver for attrition.
- Pilot a shorter working day model, by working together with a commissioner, production company and production who are willing to challenge and test the status quo. To include designing a longer-term return on investment metric to evaluate the model.
- Disseminate the learnings from the pilot to challenge industry thinking and stimulate broader systemic change across the industry.

METHODOLOGY

The action research comprised a number of activities. We started with a rapid review of existing published evidence on working practices and workload issues in film and TV production. To consolidate our knowledge of the baseline context, we then undertook a series of interviews with industry experts including commissioners, heads of production and directors (from within both broadcasters and independents).

Building on these, the core element of the project took the form of action research with four television productions running in Scotland. These comprised a Continuous Drama Series, a Terrestrial TV drama, a long running series production, and a HETV Drama from a streaming platform. They ranged in size from teams of 70 to 450.

The production companies agreed to take part in response to an open invitation from BECTU Vision and Screen Scotland, and all individuals who opted to be involved in the research regarded flexible working to be generally important and beneficial.

The research was designed to build qualitative insights into the barriers and enablers for flexible working, based on the experiences of people currently working within scripted drama. We conducted a range of individual interviews with production leads and production crew including line producers, production managers, camera and sound, costume, art department and make-up. We also held a focus group for crew, and conducted site visits to two of the productions.

The interviews explored the following questions:

- How important is flexible working regarded to be, and is it perceived to bring benefits?
- What is the lived experience of flexible working, and what are perceived to be the enablers of, and barriers to, flexible working within film and television production?
- What needs to change to facilitate and support any opportunities that are identified to improve or embed flexible working within film and television production?

All interviews and focus groups were conducted via video call between 10th May and 15th July 2022. Site visits took place in July 2022.

COMMON MODELS FOR THE WORKING DAY

There are three different types of working day in production (see panel) and our research found that on-set crews do not favour CWDs as they are often unable to take a break and step away. For example, one crew member spoke of being followed to the toilet and asked why he was breaking away from the set.

However, crew and production leads also evidenced that stopping for an hour's lunch (in SWDs) is not conducive to a productive working day. They cited a post-lunch lag where people had to build their momentum again, with the knowledge that they still had a significant amount of the day ahead of them. (There was an exception to this feeling on the continuous drama series, which had much more consistent, structured working days).

The use of SCWDs was seen as one immediate way to reduce the working day a little, and seemed to be preferred by some of the crew we interviewed. Interestingly, its use has become more common due to the pandemic, when it was necessary to stagger lunch queues to adhere to social distancing.

Good practice – as recommended by Bectu – is still for crews to be offered a full lunch break within SWDs. Our research suggested interest from crews in a composite approach between SWDs and SCWDs, to accommodate different departmental preferences.

However, working days of 10+ hours are not sustainable over long periods of time. Depending on the type of role, there should be potential to shorten the working day through job shares, part-time working, split shifts, or more broadly through trying to reduce the length of the working day for all.

3 COMMON MODELS OF THE WORKING DAY IN TV DRAMA (AT THE TIME OF THE RESEARCH IN 2022)

Standard Working Day (SWD):

10 shooting hours plus a one-hour unpaid meal break (for example 8am-7pm)

Continuous Working Day (CWD):

9 or 10 shooting hours without a formal break (for example 8am-5pm or 8am-6pm)

Semi Continuous Day (SCWD):

Working day runs for 10hrs plus a 30min break for lunch

Planned changes to these: from January 2023, the new UK TV Drama Agreement between Bectu and PACT will be in place, making improvements to the length of the working day.



FLEXIBLE WORKING, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FILM AND TV INDUSTRY

Flexible working means different things to different people. So we determined when talking to crew it was first important to have a shared understanding of the parameters. At Timewise we use the term 'flexible working' to describe a way of working where the individual has some autonomy and control over where, when, and how much they work.

'WHERE' CREW WORK

The pandemic has opened the opportunity for those in pre-production to work in a hybrid way, as much initial work can be done virtually. In interviews, line producers all agreed that the pandemic had "made it possible; people are a bit more open to it and accept that being in the office isn't the only way to get the job done".

We also heard of examples in post-production where the editing team were working remotely from home, with appreciation of the savings on travel and subsistence.

'WHEN' CREW WORK

By this we mean the times of day or week when people work, and this is also constrained due to the nature of production roles. It's often possible in pre- and post-production phases, but particularly difficult when a production is on set (although office teams can in principle work a staggered continuous day during this phase).

'HOW MUCH' CREW WORK

During a production shoot, flexibility around 'where' and 'when' work happens is not possible for those on set. The focus is all on 'how much'.

And here's the nub: flexible working in the film and TV industry essentially means tackling the long hours culture by scoping ways to reduce the length of the 10+ hours' working day.



DRIVERS FOR WANTING TO WORK FLEXIBLY

Production crew and leaders reported three clear drivers for individuals requiring flexible working, including:

Having childcare or other caring responsibilities

“ You can’t have kids and stay. FACT.

“ It’s not just about the mums. I’m a dad and it’s hard, I’m finding it tough and it’s a juggling act. You have this unpredictability of all things which makes it impossible to plan.

Wanting to reduce the pressure of the job, scale down work commitments and/or achieve a better work-life balance to reduce burn out

“ During covid I had thoughts that I would like to change my work-life balance somehow; I appreciated the time at home. I don’t have family but enjoyed time off to see family / friends and have an evening like normal people.

Wanting to reduce their working hours as they move into their later career and can no longer sustain the long working days

“ People don’t retire they just disappear. They don’t come back to a production. It’s not until a year later that you think ‘I wonder what happened to that guy’. There is no ramp down, no slow exit. You are either there or you’re not.



BARRIERS TO FLEXIBLE WORKING

The barriers and constraints to flexible working are well known to many in the industry, and were cited afresh by those taking part in this research. Key insights from the interviewees are provided below.

COMMISSIONING

Commissioning budgets often do not account for last minute increases to crew rates, facilities, and other resources needed. There is a perceived view that stretching resources through long hours is the key to keeping a production to time and on budget. Therefore, at the moment, budget pressures create a tension with the industry's focus on wellbeing and mental health.

However, from the rapid evidence review we undertook and the interviews we conducted, there does not seem to be a published cost-benefit analysis to evidence the true commercial implications of reducing the working day.

“We talk about improving diversity and inclusion in the industry, but we do it with one hand tied behind our back because of the way we commission.”

EXTERNAL FORCES

The industry has to cope with many constraints that are outside the control of production teams. These include changeable weather conditions, location availability and covid restrictions, all of which can impact the length of filming days or the unpredictability of schedules. Scripted productions also have to contend with actor availability, as many actors work on back to back productions and with working hour restrictions.

Several executive leads reflected that productions are commissioned in such a rush that scripts are not always production-ready, which then causes inefficiencies and delays during production whilst waiting for last minute script edits. This in turn can exacerbate longer hours and limit opportunities for flexible working.

“There's no thought given to the crew in production. Last minute script changes, changes to the dynamics of actors. All of it impacts us, there's not much more you could throw at us on top of the long days.”

THE CULTURE AND MINDSET

Working an 11-hour day is embedded as standard practice and accepted as part of the culture. In both film and television, interviewees suggested that the industry has been able to improve on-screen diversity much more quickly than off-screen diversity, because of the long hours worked by production teams. They also told us that without practical examples of how work can be done differently, assumptions will persist.

Yet almost every productivity study shows that people produce better quality work at a higher output level when working close to an eight-hour day rather than a ten-hour one. By making it easier to share work out, productivity and quality could be improved.

“If you change just how one person works, you change the dynamic of the team. It's just not what we do.”

“Our biggest challenge will be the assumptions that we have ingrained in us that there is no other way to make this work. We put it into the 'too hard to do box' despite us all wanting it to happen.”

LACK OF SLACK IN THE SYSTEM

All interviewees, whether in a lead role or frontline crew, highlighted the lack of capacity and headspace to be able to consider flexible working properly and make it work.

For smaller productions, there may simply be too few crew members to enable flexible working to be successfully implemented. Such productions were highlighted as having resourcing problems in general.

“For a creative industry we're not very creative when it comes to our crew.”

PRESSURE ON RESOURCING

Due to skills shortages, there have been instances of plugging gaps by encouraging younger talent to climb the production ladder quickly. In our interviews, both crew and executives reflected on the dangers for the wider team of having people in roles they are not quite ready for. It can lead to greater inefficiencies and therefore even longer days. Moreover, strong managerial skills and experience are needed to manage flexibility well in teams.

“ I worked as head of department and agreed upfront for myself and my team to work 9-5 at a reduced rate but with the flexibility. It worked brilliantly - the team loved it and we made it work but I had to be strong and push for it. I moved on and my 2nd stepped up to take over the department. He wasn't as experienced as me and slowly the hours have changed, and the team are now working on low pay and long hours. He's burnt out and feels like he's failed, and the team are leaving.

INCONSISTENCY IN RECRUITMENT

The situation is not helped by a lack of consistent recruitment structures, with each production crewing up based on the leader's preferences. Crews talk about 'moving together' and producers talk about how they recycle crew.

If a Head of Department has little experience of managing people who work flexibly, they are much less likely to consider breaking down a role and offering options to work in different ways. Where the leader has either worked flexibly themselves or seen it happen, they are more skilled to manage it.

Additionally, where productions have greater rigour and control, such as continuous drama series, we saw more openness to a variety of flexible working options.

“ I have 4 units that I work with, and I use them repeatedly.



HOW CREW EXPERIENCE THE LACK OF FLEXIBILITY

Here, we provide reflections from the interviews on a few specific problems related to flexible working in the industry.

THE STRESS OF LONG DAYS AND BACK TO BACK PRODUCTIONS

The exhaustion that crew feel as a result of the long hours culture is widely recognised by industry leads. The long day is stress-inducing in many different ways, one of which is the constant inability to produce high quality work without revisions being necessary due to delays and changes beyond the crew's control. Freelancers have to pitch for each new job on the record of their previous role, and that often involves either confessing to – or covering up – mistakes that are not their fault.

Moreover, the long hours culture is being exacerbated by the boom in the industry. Pre pandemic, crew typically took breaks between productions, using this time to recover from the long working hours and demands. Now, crew are being immediately snapped up to move to another production.

As one interviewee stated, the risk is that in moving from production to production with long working hours, the industry is not thinking about the longevity of people.

The crew have less of a sense of control over their lives, which is ironic for a cohort of freelancers. Employers need to work with freelancers to develop the kind of protocols that will make it easier to share out work amongst colleagues, as one of the characteristics of freelancing should be 'substitutability'. A sensible industry would want this too, so they could ramp up or ramp down – particularly during a crunch period – by engaging extra hands instead of demanding more overtime from an existing crew.

“How realistic is it to continue at this speed AND keep people in the business? It's all very short sighted and reactive.

THE TENSION BETWEEN PAY AND FLEXIBILITY

The sector is predominantly made up of transient creative freelancers, usually paid on a weekly basis for a fixed time period on a production. Crew will understandably look to maximise earnings, so find it hard to turn down a job based on the long hours. Ensuring that work is sustainable to avoid burn-out is on their radar, but often takes a backseat.

Heads of Production and Producers were nervous to reduce the working day (with the hours and pay spread over a greater number of days instead), fearing this would result in crew opting to work on other jobs for 'quicker cash'. By contrast, however, the majority of crew we spoke with welcomed the idea of shorter days. They talked of their fear of not being offered jobs if they expressed a wish to work flexibly.

There are clearly perceptions on both sides that have the potential to be challenged.

“You'd keep me in this industry longer if I could scale down my days. I'm not ready to leave but I can't keep going like this.

CAREER COMPROMISE

Interviewees who had managed to find a flexible role highlighted problems in moving from job to job because of the lack of choice across the industry. They reported needing to 'sell' their way of working all over again to a whole new team, and felt their career progression was compromised by not being able to move to a flexible role in a more stretching production.

“I have a line producer who is a new mum working with me doing a cast contracting role. It's significantly below her capability, but it's the only way she can work flexibly and keep one toe in the industry.

TACTICAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ENABLERS FOR CHANGE

During our conversations with leaders and crew we heard about a range of practical examples of flexibility already in place, and ideas for where and how they think it could work.

ENABLING FACTORS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

The interviewees identified instances where flexibility was easier to implement:

- **The type of role:** some are much easier to flex, such as production teams, art department and costume and make-up.
- **The stage of production:** pre and post production lend themselves more readily to flexible working, while the production shoot itself is the most challenging.
- **The type of production:** some can offer more flexibility than others, often because they are more stable by nature (such as continuous drama or long running series productions).

CREW LED JOB DESIGN SOLUTIONS

Crew recognised a number of options for flexibility: job share, working 4 days in 5, and working on a daily stand-in basis. Roles which do not require the individual to be present on set were also seen as being open to some remote working.

We were given specific examples where there is scope for crew to work flexibly:

- **Line Producers and Art Directors** working 4-day weeks including 1 day from home
- **Office based roles** such as finance, clearance co-ordinators and cast contractors' teams working flexibly on an hourly rate (with earnings based on output, and days planned around their capacity and the output needed). Other 'office' roles identified as being suitable to flex included buyers, location scouts and travel and hotel co-ordinators.
- **Production designers** where the duration of their input on a project can be reduced by splitting the role: a senior designer can do the initial design, and then hand over to another designer to go into production.

- **Costume and make-up** where individuals have been able to share the day with another team member. For example, one person working to robe and get ready for the day, while the other works on tidy ups and de-robing at the end of the day. Teams were also able to work blocks or split the working week.
- **The First Assistant Director role** may be difficult to work on a flexible basis. However, when questioned, interviewees could see the opportunity to have a second AD and runners' jobs split by day or by blocks for longer running series. This happened during the pandemic to cover sickness, and so has forced an example of a flexible role split that was previously considered unworkable.
- **Technical crew:** sound, camera, riggers, and electricians were all seen as much more difficult to work on a flexible basis day to day. However, it could be possible to block split for longer productions.

Interviewees could see the potential benefits to the production team as a whole, as well as to those working flexibly. For example, a Costume Supervisor saw the benefit of having available flexible resource to bolster the team. They are already using dailies, but having resource that could work a part day to support with prep, admin and buying would add real benefit with little additional cost. This was something they had not considered before having the conversation with us.

CASE STUDIES NEEDED TO ENABLE CHANGE

The interviews highlighted that although there are examples of flexible working, little has been documented and shared. Those we spoke to who want to work flexibly said that they would really welcome more transparency in what is possible, through case studies and guidance. This would enable them to feel confident to ask for flexibility, being able to prepare a case for negotiation by citing examples of it working.

BECTU Vision have already made in-roads on support for people seeking flexibility, with their Take-two guidance for those who wish to consider job share. This research highlights an opportunity to develop further resources to outline other forms of flexible working, suitable for different specific roles in production.

FACILITATING JOB SHARES

Those interested in job sharing were quick to highlight their need to identify a suitable partner who worked in the same job family as them, and also their preference to find someone with whom they already had a relationship.

To help individuals to identify those willing to job share on productions, there is an opportunity to advocate for people to state in their job profiles and CV's that they are open to it. It should also be recognised that this can be flexible, with crew members opting in or out of job share on a production-by-production basis.

Another way to facilitate job shares is by supporting the additional cost of handover time through the training budget, on the grounds that job shares can help to retain crew and also bring back lost talent. Stand-alone short days could be created, building on the example we saw for additional 9am-2pm resource for the costume department. Where productions are large enough to support this, it would give crew the opportunity to test flexible working by modelling teams differently with little to no risk.

LEVERAGING TRAINING BUDGET TO SUPPORT JOB SPLITS

During our interviews we spoke with a Line Producer who was currently working virtually due to personal needs. To facilitate this, the production had created a supervisory role, with a more junior line producer physically on production. The two individuals were working together to split the responsibilities of the role, whilst at the same time using the opportunity as a value-add training opportunity to upskill the less experienced line producer.

The example we saw was a way to facilitate career progression through mentoring and training of the Junior Line Producer. The job split also enabled the Senior Line Producer to work a role alongside their caring responsibilities, and thus retain their skills and experience in the industry.

WHAT IS A 'JOB SPLIT'?

At Timewise we refer to a 'job-split' when a role is split into two distinct positions and duties are divided based on experience. This differs from a job share, where work is more evenly assigned between two people, who cover the same role at different times.

“How we work fits well with what we are doing with production training. I work less hours and take home less salary. With that cost reduction and funding from Screen Scotland's training budget, we were able to bring in a trainee line producer and share responsibility for the role.

When we talked with others about the viability of this for other productions and across different roles, it was received positively. People were not aware of job splitting as a concept, but could see it as an opportunity to develop into their next role or work flexibly whilst sharing their knowledge.

We believe that this alignment of training with flexible working should be explored in greater detail, to understand how replicable it is. It may have real potential to bridge the development gap for those at mid-level who are seeking to gain greater experience in a safe environment. It also gives the more experienced person the flexibility to meet personal commitments, work on more than one production (role dependent), or keep working into their later career.



STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

To effect real change, more strategic interventions will be required with collaboration between commissioners, production companies and wider industry bodies (for example Screen Scotland and membership and training bodies such as ScreenSkills and PACT). This section outlines some of the potential longer term solutions.

LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY

All those we spoke to highlighted that the main enabler for flexible working has always been a receptive leader who had either worked flexibly themselves or knew individuals working flexibly, and wanted to keep hold of them. This immediately highlights a cultural problem, as implementing flexibility more widely will require strong Producers and Line Producers who can break the standard model and look at the output of roles and the associated people and hours' work required.

There is a real need to build more capabilities at a senior level (whether Heads of Production, Line Producers or Heads of Department), to understand the case for flexible working more generally and create a culture that can facilitate it across all productions.

PRE-PRODUCTION INVESTMENT

There was a recognition amongst those we spoke to that to minimise delays and longer working hours caused by changes during production, the creative voices need to be challenged to plan better in the early stages. Problems range from last minute location changes through to unexpected production design requirements due to script amendments, all of which carry significant cost implications both in people's time and direct spend.

It would be worth exploring with commissioners the extent to which more time given to pre-production would enable teams to resource in a less reactive way across a longer period. The potential here is to remove the reliance on dailies and have a consistent flexible resource in their crew. It should be noted however that this feedback was provided by crew, and that script writers were not consulted as part of the research.

BUILDING ON THE POSITIVE EXAMPLES THAT ALREADY EXIST

There is an opportunity to showcase successful instances of flexible working in specific production roles, as this can enable conversations to happen in a more structured way. Our experience from other sectors shows that case studies can stimulate action by explaining HOW the role has been done flexibly, involving a 360 review to include the perspective of the person who enabled the role, as well as that of the role holder.

By codifying how they made the role work flexibly, it provides a template for others. There is then potential to test a broader approach to flexibility across other productions.

Case studies are often best explored and documented by an external agency which understands how flexibility works.

APPOINTING FLEX CHAMPIONS WITHIN PRODUCTIONS

There is an opportunity to create flexible working champions within production teams, to identify scope for flexibility in schedules and working patterns and advocate for change. The flex champions could also provide practical advice to heads of departments on how to implement flexibility.

Either Screen Scotland or BECTU Vision could convene an independent network of flex champions amongst freelancers, with representatives from a range of departments. They might themselves work flexibly and could provide advice to productions at crewing up stage and sporadically throughout the production.

Another option is for each production accessing public funds to be tasked with identifying its own flex champion or champions across a few departments.

Whichever route is followed, flex champions would need to be involved from the early stages of pre-production and have a level of seniority to ensure they can influence how resource is hired and deployed. They would also need to be equipped with training and resources around flexible job design.

We recommend further scoping and consultation between Screen Scotland, BECTU Vision and Heads of Production to review the most effective approach for establishing flex champions on Scottish productions.

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF A SHORTER WORKING DAY

Our rapid evidence review revealed a lack of wide scale analysis of the true demand for flexibility amongst crew, and the extent to which the lack of flex is a driver for attrition. Yet within the four productions we worked with, we came across considerable latent demand.

The headline factor here is a clamour for a shorter working day. The majority of crew and producers we spoke to were of the belief that this is the way to fundamentally change the industry, increase retention and minimise burn out.

However, during the interviews we also heard anecdotal comments that the cost to reduce the working day by extending a production schedule would be significant. Yet, again, we were unable to access any analysis or trials which confirmed this perception.

There is a clear opportunity to undertake wider research and analysis to test the assumption that crew won't do a longer shoot for shorter working days. A cost benefit analysis to model the true impact of this approach could be commissioned, either in retrospect from a completed production or based on a planned one. This modelling should also test certain hypotheses such as adjustments from weekly crew rates to a total fixed production fee, and the implication of that on cost.

The evidence could then be used to build the case to commissioners for different models of work, and also support further investment in trialling these.

TRIALLING A SHORTER WORKING DAY OUTPUT MODEL

Following on from the cost benefit analysis, it would be feasible to pilot a reduced working day over a shorter drama production (10 -12 weeks) or a second series production where the commissioning body and leadership team were prepared to support and test the model. The trial could be undertaken either within a specific department or across the full production, subject to further consultation.

THE PRINCIPLES (BASED ON A 10-WEEK PRODUCTION)

Reduce the working hours per day and extend (in this example by 1 week, to 11 weeks) *

- No weekend working, to build in more predictable time off
- Include a clear lunch break into the day
- Pay based on fixed output fee for the crew. Costed up based on a whole production fee, not a daily rate per week.
- Guardrails around this to protect the crew (if the production runs over 11 weeks, then crew pay reverts to weekly).
- Crew enabled to opt-in on a voluntary basis to a reduced working day arrangement.

* Exact weekly hours cap would need to be scoped and agreed with unions.

When we discussed this model with crew members there was overwhelming support for it, provided the model was communicated clearly and crew were not compromised on pay (i.e. the total fee for shorter days and a longer shoot would equate to the same hourly rate as for longer days and a shorter shoot).

Interviewees identified benefits for both crew and production. These included crew feeling more incentivised to get the job done throughout the day with no lag time or day fatigue; and a belief that shorter days would result in less time required at the end of the production to 'recover' before they could move to the next production. By fixing the crew fees upfront there was also a belief that the additional cost to the overall production would not be significant.

NEXT STEPS

Modelling a shorter working day would require funded support to undertake:

- Some additional analysis to review any international examples (we were told of some from Scandinavia)
- Further cost benefit analysis as per above
- Scoping to determine productions with the right criteria and leadership engagement to take part
- Experts to work with the crew to facilitate the trial.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Timewise and BECTU Vision have reviewed all the feedback from contributors to this research and proposed a number of recommendations for further action. The first two recommendations are shorter term activities that could be undertaken by production companies with some facilitation and support. The second two recommendations would require a wider strategic collaboration between Screen Scotland, broadcasters, and a cohort of production companies.

1. CAPTURE AND SHARE EXISTING GOOD PRACTICE TO BUILD THE CASE FOR CHANGE

- Screen Scotland to work with production companies in receipt of existing funding to **document existing good practice** on flexible working and **produce a series of case studies** to publish and disseminate widely across Scotland.
- Screen Scotland and BECTU Vision to host a series of webinars to **convene leaders** across production companies, commissioners, and independent producers, to communicate existing good practice and facilitate wider knowledge sharing with a view to incentivising further action on flexible working. This could include exploring how to build stakeholder engagement to invest in some of the recommendations identified below.

2. UNDERTAKE COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

- Screen Scotland to undertake **further modelling** to assess the case for trialling a shorter working day model, and to design a longer-term return on investment metric to assess the likely impact on efficiencies and also on crew job satisfaction, wellbeing, and retention.
- There is additionally an opportunity to commission **a wider survey**, either across Scotland or UK wide to evidence both the latent demand for flexibility (including for a shorter working day), and the extent to which the lack of flex is a key driver for attrition. This research was small scale, but suggests there is a gap in knowledge at a wider workforce level.

3. RINGFENCE TRAINING BUDGETS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

- Screen Scotland to make a business case for ringfencing funding from existing training budgets to **trial some of the interventions proposed as enablers for flexible working**, as a means to support new entrants into the industry, attract returners and enable mentoring from experienced crew whilst offering reduced working hours. For example, piloting a job split between a senior and junior crew member, as an aid to facilitating progression. Or funding the hand-over time for a job share involving an additional daily crew member to work flexible shorter hours, where teams work to tight and sometimes restricted resource. Or funding to support an agreed number of handover days per production, to facilitate more streamlined job shares. These trials would need to be evaluated by looking at the impact in terms of crew welfare and wellbeing, with cost benefit analysis undertaken to assess savings on emergency dailies and potential longer-term impact on talent attraction and retention.
- Screen Scotland could also ringfence training budget to develop more **detailed guidance for production leads**, including how to learn from workforce planning and job design methodologies used in other industries. Existing training leads could also be upskilled to champion and promote flexible working from the early stage of pre-production. **The flex champion training** lead would themselves require training to understand job design options and advocate for these types of roles. Timewise could facilitate this on behalf of Screen Scotland.
- Commissioners and funders such as Screen Scotland could also consider **making it a requirement that** productions undertake training and actively consider trialling job share or job split opportunities where possible on productions. This would align with the Scottish government's fair work criteria to offer flexible working at the point of hire.

4. UNDERTAKE A SHORTER WORKING DAY PILOT

- There is an opportunity to pilot a shorter working day with the engagement of a commissioner, production company and production who are willing to challenge and **test new models of working**. The model would require clear parameters and would look at improving ways of working for crew, whilst assessing the increase in cost to do so.
- This pilot could **challenge industry thinking**, breaking down the perceived risk and cost associated with better and more flexible ways of working. It would provide deep dive case study examples of how shorter working days can work at a team and production level, and the learnings would have the potential to stimulate far broader systemic change across the industry.
- A pilot would require a collaboration and shared investment between industry bodies such as Screen Scotland (potentially through training funds), commissioners and a cohort of production companies and line producers open to trialling a new approach, and then **sharing the insights to influence wider industry change**.



CONCLUSION

Our research set out to explore concerns around the lack of flexible working in the film and television industry, and also to identify potential opportunities for improvement. Insights from our action research are based on the experiences of those currently working within scripted drama in Scotland.

There are a number of systemic barriers to flexible working including a lack of capacity and capability due to wider commercial constraints and budget reductions, coupled with the acceptance of long working hours being embedded in the culture of the industry as standard practice. There are also very real operational constraints around ways of working in production.

Despite these barriers, our conversations with leaders and crew highlighted a range of examples where flexibility is already in place, as well as ideas for where they think it could work across industry.

There was both a strong desire to trial new ways of working and a clear business case for production companies and broadcasters to consider how to enable this. Producers, commissioners and production crew all acknowledged that change is critical, in order to retain

skilled and experienced talent, enhance equality diversity and inclusion, and build career pathways for new entrants that provide good, healthy and sustainable working practices with opportunities for progression.

We have identified and recommend a number of opportunities for action. Some of these are tactical suggestions based around practical adjustments to ways of working that could be undertaken within production companies.

However, we believe that stimulating real change across the industry will require wider strategic partnership, bringing together industry bodies, commissioners and production companies to trial a new working model involving a shorter working day. The aim is to build the evidence and provide a roadmap for how to enable different and sustainable ways of working that are also commercially viable.

By taking a proactive approach and creating a pro flex culture, the hope is that the industry can retain talent and reduce the dropout rate for those not able to work the long hours; and in tandem reduce the mental ill health associated with working in this industry.



REFERENCES

1. Looking Glass Report, 2020 <https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Looking-Glass-Final-Report-Final.pdf>
2. https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Film-and-TV-Charity-Retention-Report.pdf?utm_campaign=Older%20Workers%20Paper&utm_source=Press&utm_medium=Older-Retention&utm_term=Press&utm_content=Older-Retention-Press
3. ONS, Families and the Labour Market, 2021 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/familiesandthelabourmarketukmaindatasetusingthelabourforcesurveyandannualpopulationsurvey>
4. BFI Skills Review 2022
5. Ibid
6. Televisual Jan 2022