

DESIGNING A BLUEPRINT FOR A SHORTER WORKING DAY IN FILM & SCRIPTED DRAMA

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INTRODUCTION



THE CONTEXT: WHY A SHORTER WORKING DAY IS NEEDED

Long hours in the film and television industry are not just part of an inevitable culture born of passionate, creative people; nor are they the result of unpredictable pressures during filming. They are systemic – hard-wired into production schedules in advance of the shoot, with a standard working day of 10+ hours.

The industry has been taking measures to address this – the new PACT and Bectu TV drama agreement, introduced from the start of 2023, restricts the working day to a maximum of 10 hours. It also defines paid time clearly for prep and wrap outside of this, sets out how overtime must be paid, and ensures advance notice for weekend working.¹

However, while many crew members acknowledge the agreement gives them fairer remuneration for hours worked, they do not believe it addresses the deeper underlying issue of a long working day. The stress felt by crew is evidenced in health and safety data and is becoming unsustainable. The Film and TV Charity's Looking Glass research suggests that 86% of people in film and television experience mental ill-health², only 11% think that the industry is a mentally healthy place to work³, and 57% say that lack of control over their working hours negatively impacts their mental health.⁴

The unpredictable nature of how much work gets commissioned in the industry is compounding the problem. 2022 was a year of significant growth, as UK inward investment soared to a huge £5.37bn.⁵ This led to skill shortages, wage inflation and increased pressure on

crew to complete productions quickly. 2023 has conversely seen slow growth due to high inflation, consequent loss of advertiser spending, and the recent SAG-AFTRA and writers strikes. All of this puts significant pressure on people working in the industry, the majority of whom are freelancers who have to work long hours when work is available, and have no safety net when work dries up.⁶

As Bectu has recently highlighted, this creates an incredibly challenging environment for individuals to work in; their livelihoods are precarious, with periods when they have no work; and they lack any leverage to negotiate their hours in times when there is too much work. Production companies also face challenges, with many experienced professionals quitting the industry for good while at the same time it is increasingly difficult to attract new talent.

Industry bodies recognise that these issues need addressing, and there have been initiatives such as wellbeing research and skills and training programmes for new entrants. Yet to date there has been very little published research or exploration of the potential benefits of more flexible ways of working.

The TV and film industry is a long way behind other UK sectors on flexible working, which is widely used as a talent attraction tool and a way to protect staff wellbeing. A review of the length and inflexibility of the working day is long overdue.

SCOPE OF THIS PROJECT

Following an initial research project on flexible working in 2022, Timewise and BECTU Vision undertook a feasibility study in 2023 to explore the viability of commissioning a production that would test a shorter working day in scripted drama. The study was funded by BBC Drama Commissioning, Screen Scotland and The Film and TV Charity.

This report summarises the findings of the study, which explored the optimum model for a shorter working day. The work comprised a mixture of research and shadowing two Band 2 television series whilst they were filming.⁷

The findings then informed the creation of two comparison budgets and schedules for a shorter working day, based on the two separate productions, in order to assess the cost implications for producing on this basis. While the detailed times and costings are available only to the organisations directly involved in the project, the key success indicators and guiding principles for the successful implementation of a shorter working day are captured in this report.

The intention is that this analysis and supporting insights will incentivise a wider discussion across broadcast commissioners. We hope this will ultimately lead to the commissioning of a scripted production on a shorter working hours basis, with the learning from this approach captured as a case study.



WHAT WE DID

Our feasibility study for a shorter working day focused on scripted productions and comprised:

Initial research

- Interviews and conversations with industry leaders from the BBC, Screen Scotland, Bectu, PACT, Screen Skills, The Film and TV Charity, and a number of commissioners and independent production companies. The aim was to explore their views on the feasibility of a shorter working day, including any experience of trying different ways of working and the lessons learnt.
- Desk research and follow up interviews with The Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance Australia and Senoch (the Swedish union for service and communication employees), to find successful models from other countries for a shorter working day.
- A poll of over 800 UK crew members, to ascertain their preferences.

Designing a framework for a shorter working day

Based on the findings of our research, we developed a 'framework' for what an 8 hour working day could look like. We took this into a production shadowing phase, to explore reactions to it and assess its viability.



Shadowing two productions

We worked alongside two Scottish productions during filming, shadowing their work and conducting a series of interviews with people across the full range of production roles, to get a 360° perspective. Both productions were band 2 scripted productions with budgets of £850,000-£3,000,000 per broadcast hour.

The aim was to get the production teams to consider whether and how the work they were doing could be adapted to the shorter working day of the framework, and what adjustments might be needed to ways of working, schedule and budget. By capturing views while they were filming 'in the zone', we could get a level of granularity not possible otherwise. We scoped:

- The optimum hours per day and what kind of breaks were necessary.
- The potential risks, implications for the inter-dependency of the different departments, and what contingencies might be needed to cope with unpredictable delays.
- How long the schedule would need to be extended by to accommodate a shorter day.
- What the impact would be on costs.

Creating a viable schedule and budget for a shorter working day

The insights from the research and shadowing were then used to inform the creation of a retrospective schedule and budget for both productions.

A detailed specification was developed, to brief Assistant Directors and Line Producers on how to build the schedule and budget based on running to an eight hour shooting day. To accompany this analysis, we also produced a set of guiding principles which are included at the end of this report. These outline key factors for commissioners and production companies to consider during implementation, in terms of good practice and efficiency planning.

Timewise and BECTU Vision are now convening a wider commissioners' group to secure commitment to explore how to take this model forward.

INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH



INTERVIEWS WITH INDUSTRY LEADERS

We spoke to several production companies, commissioners and industry bodies and our first question was whether there had been any previous attempts to shorten the working day. There was anecdotal feedback about an attempt in the US by Clint Eastwood, who apparently implemented a reduced day on a feature production there, but when it came to the UK there was little to report. It's possible there have been a small number of instances, but there is no documentation to evidence how and when they were done or whether they were successful.

There appeared to be a reticence to discuss any previous tests of a shorter day because of the commercial implications. While in principle the industry leads agreed that a shorter working day could be done, there were concerns around the possibility of adding any cost to the bottom line.

The industry leads also referenced the 2023 Bectu/PACT agreement as improving the working lives of crew. The perception is that crew are now being better paid for the hours they work and that any impact to this would not be well received, in terms of reduced hours and therefore reduced pay. While many welcomed the study and agreed that working hours should be reviewed, there was a shared view that it will be very hard to change the working

culture of crew, despite their knowledge that it would help their wellbeing. The view is that because crew are freelance, money is their biggest driver and not something they would be willing to compromise on.

There were also concerns that a shorter day might not be well received by cast and agents who are restricted by available times to film, as any shortening of hours would result in a potentially longer shoot and therefore have an impact.

All the leads we spoke with agreed that a shorter working day could only be a good thing for attraction and retention of crew members. However, without tangible evidence, they couldn't see how it could work given the current demands on the industry of time, cost, and quality.

It should be noted that the majority of interviews were conducted before the start of the SAG actors' strike in July 2023 which has subsequently had a negative impact on freelance crew in the UK, with a downturn in production. This has raised concerns that many freelancers will leave the industry for good, unable to cope with the precariousness of work. And once the strike is over and production commissioning is able to pick up, the underlying issues around working practices will remain a problem for retaining crew in the long term unless addressed.⁸

GLOBAL RESEARCH – IS ANYONE DOING THIS OUTSIDE THE UK?

The lack of insight in the UK led us to a UNI Global Union report ‘Demanding Dignity Behind the Scenes: Ending Long Hours Culture in the Global Film and TV Industry’. From this, we searched worldwide for successful implementation of a shorter filming day, and found a small number of examples. Film industry hours in France are reported to be ten hours’ continuous working including prep and wrap; in Sweden they are 9 hours including prep and wrap; while in Spain the TV industry has a limit of 40-43 working hours per week excluding prep and wrap.

The most embedded shorter day seemed to be the Swedish model, so we looked at this in more detail to understand how it works on a day-to-day basis. In the main, the driver is government-led protection around working hours – Swedish legislation limits the working week to 40 hours. In film and TV this is managed over an accounting period of 4 weeks, during which the average week can’t exceed 40 hours. This means that within an aggregated 4-week period, variation is possible if working hours need to be stretched (for example to align with cast availability), provided this is balanced by reduced hours at other times. However, on any one day, the maximum hours are limited by collective industry agreement to ten hours (eleven including an unpaid hour for lunch).

Across the sector, productions are roughly split between running on a 4-day week with 10-hour days, or a 5-day week with shorter and sometimes variable hours. The First Assistant Director creates a schedule based on the parameters set by the production company.

The shorter working day in Sweden is enforced by legislation, and also reflects a different national working culture to the UK. However, it does tell us that it is possible to make this kind of model work, and anecdotal feedback from the film industry is positive – problems with work-life balance and wellbeing are not such a concern in Sweden as they are here in the UK.



THE SWEDISH MODEL

The weekly schedule

Within the framework of legislation and collective industry agreements, productions must keep to an average 40 hour week over a four week block, with a maximum 10 hours on any one day. Schedulers (led by First Assistant Director) choose between:

- Four-day week with long days (10 hours +1 hour unpaid lunch break)
- Five-day week with eight-hour days
- Five-day week with a variable pattern, (e.g. 10 – 8 – 9 – 7 – 6 = 40 hours).

Final schedules are locked in 14 days in advance of first day of photography, for each filming block.

A collective industry agreement imposes a penalty fee for any late changes to schedule, with no exceptions for weather conditions / cast illness etc. The cost implications tend to ensure that productions stick to schedule by finding other solutions to unforeseen delays.

Overtime

While overtime can be worked in exceptional circumstances, it can’t be planned for in the schedule and it can’t become the norm. The collective agreement prevents this by ruling that overtime must be requested at no less than two hours’ advance notice, and that the working day must never be longer than 10 hours.

POLL RESULTS – WHAT CREW WANT

A 2022 Timewise and BECTU Vision project had suggested that crew would welcome a shorter working day, but this was based on a small sample of people across four productions. As part of this year's project, we therefore ran a national poll, seeking to quantify what crew want and what trade-offs they are happy to accept.

The answers to multiple choice questions and also the open comments both suggested that all departments and all levels saw some real value in a shorter working day, for the industry as well as for their own wellbeing. This applied even allowing for impact on the day rate, contradicting expectations that freelancers would resist any changes that reduced their short-term wage potential.

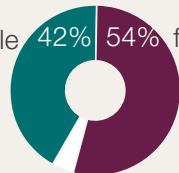
The preferred length for filming days was 8 hours. When asked about their preference for a 4- or 5-day working week, 55% of respondents told us they would consider either.

UK poll demographics

812
respondents

Even gender split:

male 42% 54% female



4% prefer not to say

41%

mid-level roles, but good representation across all seniority levels and types of roles

Good spread across all ages (biggest group was 25-44 years) and **regions** (36% Scotland, 35% London, 29% rest of UK)

“ Why has it taken this long? I don't know anyone who is happy with the insane number of hours we work.

“ A shorter working day would change everything. Without it I'm not sure I can continue in the industry and continue to be exhausted, with hardly any social life or life outside of work.

Highest priority of crew



Work-life balance **41%**



Mental health **13%**



Income **10%**

How crew want to work



98% were interested in a shorter working day



Of whom **71%** would still be interested if it impacted their day rate.



44% Semi continuous day (10 hours plus 30 minutes unpaid lunch break)



41% Continuous day (10 hour day with no break, grabbing something to eat on the go)



15% Standard working day (10 hours plus 1 hour unpaid lunch break)



75% Value a shorter working day even if it means having no break for lunch – they just want to go home earlier. The only exception was for time out of the cold on location.



FRAMEWORK FOR A SHORTER WORKING DAY

Based on the poll, the Swedish model and conversations with UK industry leads, we created a framework for a shorter working day that we could take to two productions, to probe how workable it would be. Our investigation took place during the filming stage of the productions, to help ensure more robust responses based on the actuality of the filming day.

The framework comprised:

- 8 hour filming day, based on the preferences of UK crew
- 5 day week, so a total of 40 hours per week, which aligns with the Swedish model

- Semi continuous working pattern with a half hour unpaid lunch break (additional to the 8 hours)
- The 8 hours are filming hours, with any prep and wrap to be worked as per the Bectu/PACT agreement
- Overtime for any work beyond the 8 hours, paid at the same hourly rate as the first 8 hours of that day.
- A minimum of 36 hours of continuous time off in each seven day period.

The aim of the shadowing phase, reported over the next two sections, was to stress-test the framework with two productions and tweak it as necessary. We also needed to probe the impact that a shorter working day would have on the schedule, costs and on the inter-dependency of different departments.

SHADOWING TWO PRODUCTIONS: WHAT PEOPLE SAID

This section reports on the feedback from everyone we spoke to across the two productions, alongside wider industry contributors. We explored specific constraints as well as opportunities to implement a shorter working day, identifying what would need to change across the whole end to end production process.

PRODUCTION LEADS' PERSPECTIVE

We spoke first to production company executives, who cited the main drivers for scheduling being script availability and the availability of cast members, and how delays and restrictions around these puts pressure on the shooting phase. There was also mention of tight budget allocation and a concern that extending the shooting period to accommodate a shorter day would cost more.

At all points the process appears to be squeezed due to competing interests, because while commissioners need to deliver to a transmission date, the production company's priority is to secure the business even if they know the schedule is tight.

The production execs were aware that the squeeze can compound 'last-minute, always rushed behaviour', with the inevitable consequences landing on the crew. On one of the two productions we worked with, it was clear that the timescales gave no opportunity to work a shorter working day and extend the filming period, as the post production schedule was fixed with no opportunity to extend due to a very tight transmission deadline.

The production execs highlighted that some of the pressure stems from a change over time in the way writers work – a scripted production is now often written by one person, making them a potential single point of failure. In some cases, the writer has had years to write and edit the first script with no time pressure. But as soon as the production is given the green light and commissioned, the writer is up against it to create further episodes in a very short space of time.

While the production execs are aware of the strain on crew, they are in a similar boat themselves. They are under pressure to land a production and often need to accept late commissioning, even if it is impossible to get the script fully ready ahead of the start of filming.

COMMISSIONERS' PERSPECTIVE

We spoke to a range of commissioners and commissioning executives across a number of broadcasters to gather perspectives on the viability of a shorter working day. All were aware of the impact that late scripts have on everyone in the process, and that the time they themselves take to provide feedback contributes to this. They highlighted that they can often be working on up to ten productions, so managing all the feedback can be problematic – especially when scripts are delivered late for multiple productions at the same time, or when notes to previous drafts have not been addressed.

However, they acknowledged that there is work to do to review the pipeline and planning of productions, to address capacity and the flow of their workload. There is a particular problem in Friday being the deadline for script edits, as this often results in execs having to work over their weekends to provide feedback, sometimes with further impact on Assistant Directors and crew who also then need to work at the weekend to action changes in time for Monday. There is a view that schedules are generally unrealistic, compounded by the commercial pressures on production companies, commissioners and distributors. All stakeholders need to work together to build in more time for planning.

Their perception of the writing process is that writers are coming under increasing pressure and that many are often in high demand, so they too are working on multiple projects at any given time. Without clear deliverable milestones in place, final deadlines are often missed or de-prioritised in favour of more urgent work.

Commissioning executives were keen to find a solution to the pressure on schedules that is caused by late scripts. One opportunity for change would be to engage multiple writers on a production, to avoid the production stalling should something happen to a lone writer (illness, family needs etc). On productions scripted by a specific author, where having multiple writers is not possible, extra support or time needs to be built in.

“ Until this last-minute culture changes nothing else will change.

Another opportunity for change is to lock-in the schedules two weeks before principal photography starts (1st day of shoot) on each block, with limited script changes permitted after that date. At the moment, the week before the first day of shoot is known to be the busiest for scripts, when commissioners and editing executives try to 'cram in' all the last minute changes. Locking in the script two weeks before would require a complete shift in process, but is one that the commissioners were open to.

Commissioners also saw that the read through should not be the point when significant script changes are made. Bringing in cast and senior crew for an earlier read through was initially perceived as additional cost, but later in the discussion it was acknowledged that earlier preparation could save on production costs later in the process, to accommodate last minute script changes.

Overall, the commissioners we spoke with had the view that there needs to be a basic framework for delivery of scripts. As an example, for a six week production split into two blocks, the script for the first block could be required two weeks before the start of photography, while the script for the second block should already be at advanced draft at this point. Such a framework would need to be mutually agreed by all involved and commercially tied in; and then all parties would need to adhere to their deadlines. Some commissioners are looking at this already, but it has not been actioned as yet.

There was further discussion around a framework for earlier sign-off of edits, with a view that this would also need to ensure that late edits and slow feedback do not prevent the editing team from aligning with the shorter working day.

Implementing all these improvements in the pre and post production process will require a real shift in behaviours. The commissioners we spoke with acknowledged that changing the conversation and narrative needs to start with them and be led by them.



WRITERS AND DIRECTORS' PERSPECTIVE

We spoke to a cross section of writers and directors and their representatives from the Writers Guild, to build a picture of the likely impact on their working patterns of a shorter working day for crew. They fully supported the concept of a shorter working day, and acknowledged their role in helping to ensure that scripts are in place at the start of the funnel, to maximize production time.

Writers spoke of their concerns around being the sole writer on a production. They made a comparison to practice in the US, where multiple writers share the responsibility, reducing the potential for becoming a single point of failure. Their biggest challenge and frustration was around the front-loading of attention on early episodes, to the detriment of later ones. They believe that the roots of this can lie far back in how projects are developed, but felt that the key consideration is the need to build sufficient time between green light and the start of production.

Directors also spoke of the creation of a script becoming an impossible task for this single writer, due to the multiple opinions and changes of the executives. "As [the writer] paints a bridge, the executives are coming in behind them changing it to an aeroplane that needs different coloured paint. It's a no-win situation operating like this, there's a point where creativity becomes insanity, and we achieve nothing."

Both writers and directors believe that building early relationships with production companies and executives is essential to smooth the process of script changes. But they feel they need support to forge these relationships – one director commented that "The guardians of the relationship between writers and production creatives need to build in parameters. They need to stop the fear that directors and producers will take over – this isn't what we are trying to do; we just want to work with the writers and have some creative license to do our jobs well."

Clear script scheduling was welcomed by writers as a positive, with everyone understanding the delivery timescales for the whole production. The perception of some production companies and commissioners, that script deadlines would stifle the writers' creativity, was not one that resonated with them. The writers claimed to appreciate deadlines, provided they are reciprocal – so if they deliver their part of it, the executives need to deliver feedback within the timescales too.

CREW PERSPECTIVE

Every department we spoke with welcomed the idea of a semi-continuous 8-hour filming day. Several people said they thought crew members in other departments would prefer a longer day, but we found no instances of this being corroborated. For example, riggers were called out as needing the longer day, but when we tested this with them we were told categorically that a shorter day would be more than welcomed – “where do we sign up!”

For those who have pre and post wrap to their day, a reduction in the hours of filming was seen as a good thing, enabling them to work a shorter day in total. For example, one crew member from the make up department commented, “You are still knocking a significant amount of time off my day. When the filming crew stop, I can stop shortly after. It also allows me to plan for the next day as I have more time.”

Office based departments (production, location, accounts, art department, props and office-based costume) confirmed that they also welcomed the shorter filming day, as their work is impacted by shooting time and they tend to work around it.

The one caveat to the shorter working day came out during discussions about location shoots, where variables such as access to location, length of stay in location and daylight hours might sometimes make a longer working day more appropriate. We also heard from crew who felt more open to working longer hours (a ten hour day rather than eight hours) when working away from home, provided this was for a limited period only. For these instances an exception may be needed to the 8 hour day.

We talked to crew about the Swedish model for dealing with such exceptions, by allowing aggregated hours over a block of weeks. The production teams and crew were interested in this, but found it difficult to think retrospectively about how it could work within their production schedule. It would need more thinking through, and allowance for it would need to be incorporated into the schedule from the start.

The main barrier to a shorter day, highlighted by crew across all departments, is the current script process. Productions are often given scripts that are unrealistic in terms of the amount and nature of filming expected in a day, with little time to address this due to late delivery of scripts. As the production progresses, a shorter working day wouldn't give them enough time for all the last-minute changes and late scripts they have to accommodate.

Crew feel the problem caused by late scripts cannot be over-stated, and believe that production executives and writers seem to think that as long as the broad narrative remains the same, changes are minor and can easily be accommodated. The reality is different – even small changes can impact the schedule in many ways, for example by requiring a change of location or additional days for cast.

While crew think that a shorter day is workable in theory, they have no leverage to make the changes that are needed to the whole process. They are ‘the fixers’ at the end of the pipeline, and have no choice but to absorb the pressure that’s put on them. Their perception is that writers and production executives don’t see the impact of scripts landing late or being changed at the 11th hour, or understand the difficulties of making the production work to schedule and budget whilst maintaining quality.

When it came to discussion about the lunch break, again we had to bust myths about other departments’ preferences. Crew stated that their own teams were fine with 30 minutes, but sent us to others who they perceived would want the full hour, saying for example that “Costume and make up checks are needed, and the 1-hour lunch allows them to do that so those teams will need an hour.”



When this was tested, both costume and make-up said this wasn't the case, and that the checks didn't happen until after the lunch period, whether that was 30 minutes in a semi-continuous day or a full hour in a standard working day. They also indicated that they would prefer the semi-continuous.

We were also told that cast preferred the full hour lunch break, but when asked they said they would happily work around a shorter one. As one cast member said, "I use this time to either sleep or learn my lines, but if you were to implement a shorter working day and I had more time to sleep/prepare at the end of the day then this would be less of an issue."

It was also evident that the 30-minute lunch would work for office-based departments. However, lunch break was often their opportunity to discuss requirements and check information with directors and line producers. De-coupling their break times from that of the shoot crew would solve this.

The only genuine need that crew expressed for a longer lunch was on location when weather conditions mean they need the time to eat a hot meal and warm themselves up. As mentioned earlier, this could be dealt with as an exception.

Finally, some of the Line Producers and First Assistant Directors felt that the most recent Bectu/PACT changes to the working day are stifling good behaviour, as some producers and department heads take the attitude that "I've paid for you so you will stay even if you are doing nothing." This approach highlights a culture of presenteeism – we had feedback that even when filming is completed earlier than expected, crew are expected to stay and finish their agreed hours.

“A shorter working day right now will just add extra pressure to an already incredibly pressurised team. It would fail and we'll revert to bad habits. To make it work, the entire runway from commissioning to production needs to change.

“A shorter lunch works better unless you're standing in a ditch or up to your waist in mud, then you need the hour for everyone's wellbeing.

CAST PERSPECTIVE

Cast members interviewed would also welcome a shorter filming day. When asked if extending the shoot would be an issue, a typical response was "I would MUCH rather do a few extra weeks with fewer hours. It's a no brainer."

They talked openly about how late scripts and script changes impact their creativity and ability to deliver the role to the best of their ability. They feel they are often kept on hold, that things change all the time and they consequently have little time to prep.

Cast members were aware of the pressures on production teams and the crew around them, and could see that there are endemic problems in how the whole system works.

“Working fewer hours would not introduce any new challenges, only benefits. I would be more prepared, have more time to do script work and learn lines.



THE KEY TAKE-OUTS

IT'S NOT SOMEONE ELSE'S PROBLEM

Across all our conversations, people had ideas of what other teams would prefer in terms of ways of working, and why a shorter working day couldn't work for them. However, our research highlights that these anecdotal suggestions are myths, and not the reality for those in the other departments.

The 'myths' ranged from writers' creativity being hampered by deadlines, which the Writers Guild told us was not the case; to a full hour lunch break being reportedly needed by cast, when actors told us they wouldn't need the hour if the day was shorter; and make-up teams allegedly using a full hour's lunch break to get actors ready for the next set of scenes, when the make-up artists told us they didn't do this until the lunch break was finished, regardless of its length.

Even one of the most widely held perceptions turned out to be false – the belief that freelance crew are driven by pay and would not be willing to compromise. This view was held strongly by several of the commissioners we spoke to, yet it was tested and discounted in our poll and also through anecdotal feedback we were given during the shadowing exercise.

CHALLENGING EMBEDDED BEHAVIOURS

No team or individual told us that a shorter working day couldn't be implemented. Equally, no team or individual felt they had the authority to push back against unrealistic expectations.

There is a deeply embedded mindset in the industry that 'if it doesn't hurt it doesn't work'. Changing this long hours' culture is no one's priority, and there is no one team that can change it. The predominantly freelance nature of employment exacerbates this – no one is willing to push back and speak up because the perception is that they can and will be replaced.

The culture needs to be challenged from the top down, with change driven by all those involved. The stigma around having an open dialogue that questions the status quo must also be rectified – open communication and guiderails will be essential to make the shorter working day successful.

Producers and Directors in particular talked about the need to move towards a culture where everyone is engaged in making the shorter day work, with clear communication across all levels of the production from the exec team through to the film crew.

“ I can't tell them what's really going on, I don't want that reputation.

“ The job gets done but at what real cost - financial and human? We continue to feed the beast, so the beast never changes.”

“ We all need to be believers that it can and will work.

EARLIER SCRIPTS ARE THE KEY

A key component of the Swedish model for an 8-hour working day is the locking in of scripts four weeks in advance, with a final review two weeks before shoot. Not only does this allow the production to plan the daily schedules, it also allows each member of the crew to plan their own lives in advance. Greater predictability in the schedules was welcomed by everyone we spoke to, and it was pointed out that a shift in mindset is also needed to acknowledge that later episodes are as important as the first in a series.

We wanted to understand just how viable it would be for productions to lock in the scripts earlier. Overwhelmingly, the response was that we are currently many miles away, with scripts landing days rather than weeks before – and sometimes even on the day of filming.

Yet at every level of the process, people referenced the damaging impact of late scripts and constant editing: production execs having to edit late into the night; directors not being able to plan; knock-on delays in casting meaning that costume cannot measure and buy for the actors; late confirmation of location requirements meaning location scouts can't act; the art department having to compromise quality because of insufficient notice of what's required; cast not being adequately prepped to deliver what was needed the next day.

The inability to plan far enough in advance was universally seen to be a major barrier to reducing the working day. Locking in a schedule that is achievable, far enough ahead to allow every department to prepare effectively, would help improve the likelihood of a successful shorter working hours production. In order to enable earlier schedules, the approach to script editing needs to be reviewed as it is the root of the problem. What we heard was that preparation time cannot currently be used effectively, and that quality, creativity, and at times the Health and Safety of crew are all being compromised to respond to last minute script changes.

Production teams also report that the lateness of scripts leads to unnecessary additional costs on a daily basis – for example cancelling travel bookings at the last minute, securing extra cast, losing deposits when location venues are changed, buying costume which is never used. Such changes can run into thousands of pounds of additional cost. The belief of crew is that the executives and writers are removed from the consequences of late scripts and continual narrative changes, and don't understand the extent of them.

Commissioners are considering a framework where scripts are written and delivered well in advance of the first day of principal photography, with only minor changes subsequently allowed. Sweden already has such a framework in place, and additionally imposes penalties for running over the scheduled filming day, which helps to deter major script changes from taking place within their two week advance sign-off period.

“ We start day 1 of filming already behind, and from there on we're playing catch up.

“ The lack of proper preparation means I need to spend more money on ordering online to get faster delivery. I am then so busy that a lot of the time I don't return what I don't use. We waste money and there's also an environmental impact.

“ If you give us ten minutes, you'll get something that vaguely resembles the thing you asked for. If you give us 10 days, you'll get a top-quality product.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES AND ENABLERS

Other suggestions that cropped up during our conversations with teams during the shadowing phase are summarised here:

- The Swedish model allows for days to be aggregated over a 4-week period, with an average maximum of 40 hours per week. The production teams we spoke to felt this was a good idea, as it would enable them to plan for longer days when needed, but allow earlier finishes on other days. However, to enable this in the UK there would need to be a move away from the current culture of presenteeism.
- Another suggestion was to slowly decrease the hours of working by blocks, moving to a 9 hour day initially, before moving to 8 hours. It was perceived that this would allow teams to adapt gradually to a shorter day without it feeling like too much of a leap.
- As a solution to massive spikes in workload for the production office team, for example when booking travel for locations and hiring in crew, it was suggested that their team could be bolstered at key points.
- A balance needs to be found between achieving the best creative quality and the impact of this on the health of the crew. For example, there was a debate around the way that night shoots are currently built into a production, and whether more innovative planning could mean that the requirement to film at night is properly scrutinised with a view to crew wellbeing. Is there a workaround to avoid the current practice of pulling the production back to its normal daytime schedule by asking crew to start early on subsequent days?



SCHEDULE AND BUDGET ANALYSIS FOR A SHORTER WORKING DAY

The insights from our research and shadowing were then used to create a retrospective schedule and budget for both productions.

A detailed specification was developed, to brief Assistant Directors and Line Producers on how to build the schedule and budget based on running to an eight hour shooting day. We also produced a set of guiding principles which are included at the end of this report, outlining key factors for commissioners and production companies to consider in terms of good practice and efficiency planning during implementation of a shorter day.

OVERALL COST INCREASE

Our analysis found that a shorter working day would involve an increase in the total cost of production of 4% (provided this increase did not result in the production moving into a higher Band, with higher crew rates). The increase in cost was largely driven by the extended period needed to complete filming, based on an 8 hour working day. It should be noted that the costing analysis was done retrospectively on two productions which had completed filming.

Both productions acknowledge that if they were scheduling in real time rather than assessing a production retrospectively, there could be savings to offset some of the cost increase. However, the overall estimate provides us with workable numbers on the financial impact of implementing a shorter working day.



KEY HEADLINES

Key points from this budgeting exercise, based on a feedback session with the Assistant Directors and Line Producers we worked with, are summarised below and a detailed breakdown of the costs is included at the end of the commentary. We refer to the productions as Production A and Production B. Both were Band 2 scripted productions with 6 episodes each, and both were filmed in Scotland and on location.

- **Crew costs** Production A reported a 2% reduction in crew costs, in spite of the extra 19 days of shoot time. For Production B, were the crew to remain paid at Band 2 rates (see below for more on this), there would also be a reduction in crew costs – this time of 5%. This higher reduction was largely due to Production B standing down some of the UK crew while on location abroad.

The reduction in crew costs is surprising and needs explaining. Factors include:

- Savings in crew day rates due to a decision to pro rata them down by 20%, to adjust from 10 to 8 hours. This was based on survey feedback that the majority of crew would be prepared to accept reduced pay for a reduced working day.
- The 8 hour day was not applied to location filming, so the extra filming days needed to schedule were fewer than anticipated.
- Further savings were made through double banking of crew (where a 2nd unit films at a different location at the same time as the first unit).
- **The impact of a production's Band level**
Production B was at the very top of Band 2 and the overall cost increase of a schedule with a shorter working day saw it move into Band 3. This means that crew need to be paid at a higher rate. While Production B's reduction in crew costs (when paid at Band 2 rates) is given above, the result of paying Band 3 rates sees them increase by 22% instead of reducing. The knock on impact is that the overall production cost increases by 9% (instead of just 4%).

The learning from this is that productions will need to be comfortably within their band level to avoid a situation where the cost increase takes them into a higher band. A solution might be the creation of secondary banding specific to a shorter working day production.

- **Additional cost for cast** The review highlighted that costs for lead cast would increase because of the extended filming period. However, the First Assistant Directors acknowledged that there would be opportunities to trim down the costs for day players and regular cast if they were scheduling in real time rather than retrospectively, as they would be able to work around cast availability. They also stated that being engaged earlier in the preparation, with locked scripts, would further improve the situation as this would allow them to book cast earlier and more effectively across the shoot.
- **Bringing the First Assistant Director on board early** Extra cost was built into the budgets to involve the First AD in prep at the same time as production designers and locations. This was based on our insight that a more efficient schedule can be created if they are part of the process from an earlier stage. It will also help to achieve a locked schedule 2 weeks before principal photography.
- **Bolstering resource for certain teams** Production B built additional resource into the budget for some of their teams (art dept, hair and costume) to speed up turnarounds on shoot during the proposed 8 hour day, recognising that the shorter days would be heavy on content. Production A did not build this into their schedule but agreed that bolstering teams should be a consideration.
- **Equipment costs** These increased by 19% for Production A and 22% for Production B. We explored the possibility of a reduction in equipment costs based on reduced daily usage, however equipment hire companies confirmed that costs were already discounted based on weekly bookings and would not reduce any further.
- **Location planning** Assistant Directors acknowledged that additional days were included in the retrospective review that might not be needed when planning in real time. They would potentially be

able to be more strategic with their schedule, pulling scenes into days at the same location. Again, this may offset some of the budgeted cost increase for the shorter day.

- **Longer days when filming on location** Both crews travelled to film on location away from production base for several weeks (Production A for 2 x 16-day blocks and Production B for 15 days). Crew told us they preferred to keep to a longer working day on location, as this resulted in a shorter period away from home. Our recommendation is therefore that where there is a requirement to work on location for less than 3 weeks, productions should revert to a 10-hour working day, with this built into crew contracts.

However, if the length of time on location exceeds a 3-week period, working a shorter working day should be considered. An alternative would be to aggregate the time of longer days, enabling crew and cast to return home sooner for weekends, where the travel distance allows.

- **Post-production** Both productions extended post-production time to allow for a shorter working day. As for crew, the costs balanced out across the full period because of pro-rata'd day rates. For Production B, however, there was an increase in facilities costs because of the extra days in post-production (Production A's facility costs were agreed per episode rather than per day).
- **Swedish model of aggregated hours** We asked both productions to consider the Swedish model of aggregated hours, which allows a mix of longer and shorter days with a maximum average working week of 40 hours across a four week block. Feedback suggested that this was too difficult to assess in a retrospective review, but could potentially be utilised in real time, particularly when limited access to location or cast necessitated a temporary return to a longer working day.



PROJECTED INCREASED COSTS OF A SHORTER WORKING DAY

	Production A Band 2	Production B applying Band 2 rates*	Production B applying Band 3 rates*
Overall increase in days	19 days	12 days	12 days
Overall increase costs	4%	4%	9%
Cast cost increase	9%	13%	13%
Crew cost	-2%	-5%	22%
Production Equipment and consumables cost increase	19%	22%	22%
Location Fees / Facilities / Production Offices increase	20%	13%	13%
Post Production Picture & Sound	1%	14%	14%
Travel & Transport	12%	13%	13%

*As explained in the commentary, Production B was at the very top of Band 2 and the cost increases moved it into Band 3 where higher crew rates apply. Two sets of costs are therefore provided.

It should be noted that this is a snapshot of the overall budgeting and not all costs increased when lengthening the production. Those remaining the same included story script development, music, insurance and legal fees, production office costs and the production office fees.



CONCLUSION

Our research, which included in-depth interviews across all crew departments while shadowing two scripted drama productions, reached four key messages for production companies wanting to implement a shorter working day:

- Making assumptions about other departments' resistance to a shorter working day isn't constructive. The research confirms that all departments believe it is possible and want a change to working hours to happen.
- A review of the commissioning process is needed, to address the delivery timeline of scripts well in advance of the start of principal photography. Once the timescales in the framework are agreed, everyone needs to keep to their deadlines.
- A key barrier is cost, but our analysis shows this is not as substantive as expected by anecdotal assumptions. There is also significant potential for further efficiency savings and a reduced environmental impact with more time dedicated to the planning process.
- All the feedback from this research suggests that adopting a shorter working day will lead to healthier, more resilient crew with the potential to drive efficiencies on productions and enhance retention across the industry. Significant longer term commercial benefits are likely to stem from this.
- Industry funders and commissioners need to come together to invest in trialling a shorter working day in practice, in order to prove its viability and assess its impact.

Our crew polling found unequivocally that a shorter day is wanted and needed, and this was backed up by interviews across all departments on two scripted drama productions. The shadowing exercise also found that a shorter day would be possible to implement, provided there was better pre-planning that allowed schedules to be locked-in a few weeks ahead of the start of filming.

Key insights from speaking to experts and production leads suggest interest in a shorter day, and recognition that it may be possible, but there is some resistance due to possible cost implications.

Our blueprint for an 8 hour working day suggests additional cost in the region of 4%. This is a lower proportionate increase in cost than anticipated, as crew day rates are pro rata'd for the shorter working day and the additional filming days were also fewer than expected.

To offset some of the increased costs, we believe there are potential savings to be made, as the current script process often results in unpredicted additional costs. To maximise any savings, and indeed to facilitate a shorter working day, several changes to the pre-planning process would need to be in place (see the guidance in the final section of this report for our suggestions).

We hope a shorter working day will be adopted by the film and television industry, and have set out our recommendations for a trial in the next section of this report, followed by some practical guidelines to support successful implementation.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Following on from the findings of this project, we suggest the following actions are undertaken, to consolidate the learning by trialling the first ever practical experience of a shorter working day in UK scripted drama:

1. Commissioners and wider funders, including public funders, to address the gap in practical experience of a shorter working day by commissioning and funding a production where the shorter day would run across all departments. The process would need to be documented to ensure learnings are captured and shared, and should include a review of the final cost and potential savings.

2. The commissioned production to have a different approach to planning during the pre-production phase. For example, meetings with writers would need to start earlier, with scripts locked-in well ahead of principal photography; and the First Assistant Director would need to come onboard earlier to drive efficiencies in the schedule (see additional guidance in the next section).

3. On completion of the production, the commissioners and funders to convene industry leaders and share the experience of the shorter working day. The aim is to open and own the conversation, challenge current behaviours, and drive top down cultural change by using this case study to demonstrate that a shorter day is possible in practice.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE: IMPLEMENTING THE SHORTER WORKING HOURS MODEL

If your production company is considering a shorter working day, we recommend the following approach

Base the day on 8 filming hours

Evidence from crew suggests this is the ideal length of day – it is shorter, but long enough to achieve a lot; and it creates enough space in the day to give crew time away from work.

Where possible, the day should be semi-continuous with ½ hour unpaid lunch

Crew like working this way, and no department felt they needed a full hour for lunch if the day's work was shorter. Exceptions may be appropriate when filming on location.

Pro rata the pay rates

Our survey and site visits showed that people are willing to take a cut in their day rate to have shorter working hours. All below the line crew must be on the reduced rate, there can't be exceptions. The pay of above the line crew should stay the same where they are working on fixed fees per production.

Apply the 8 hour day to all

As well as crew, the shorter day should involve those working in production office, post production, art department, accounts. Ensure everyone also gets the ½ hour lunch, even if they are not on set (this does not have to be at the same time).

Lock-in the script 2 weeks before filming

Early scripts are essential, to allow the shooting schedule to be created one full week ahead of filming. This needs to happen on each episode, even when productions are shooting multiple episodes in the same block. To ensure lock-in happens two weeks ahead of filming:

- Commissioners and production companies to agree a locked writing schedule that works for everyone's diaries, with set turnaround times for notes.
- Commissioners to implement a no-go: if the script isn't ready, don't begin employing crew – it is a waste of money.

Invest in additional prep time for Heads of Department

Better planning and preparation will be more cost effective than trying to fix rushed work later in the process. It should also mean that art department, location scouts and costume can deliver a higher quality production.

Consider having 2 writers

If the production is multi episodic, 2 writers could help to avoid the potential for a single point of failure. It could also ensure that all episodes are given the same level of attention as the first one.

Consider aggregated hours

The Swedish model for a shorter day allows for an average of 40 hours work over a 4 week block. This provides flexibility when needed, so the schedule could plan some days to be longer, with the time compensated on other days.

Make an exception for location filming

When crew stay in accommodation away from home they would welcome a 10 hour day in order to spend less time away in total.

Protect out of office hours

Create an on-call model for production staff, with one point of contact when the office is closed. This will help to reduce the stress of an 'always on' culture. Protocols should also be set up for out-of-hours email and mobile communications.

A shorter working day is likely to mean a longer shoot with increased location, cast and equipment fees. However, our research and insights suggest that these can be partially offset if the prep process is better planned and prepped in.

Our key recommendation at this stage is for an industry funded pilot to trial this approach, capture learnings, measure benefits and assess the additional cost implications in practice.

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5. <https://www.prolificnorth.co.uk/news/broadcasting-and-commissioning-advertising-dip-or-trouble-horizon/>
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7. <https://members.bectu.org.uk/filegrab/pact-bectu-scripted-tv-agreement-sig-copy-12-december-2022.pdf?ref=3074>
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9. Amongst Scottish crew, 78% said that they would be interested in a shorter day regardless of the pay impact.

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