

Discussion Paper 2021/03

The challenges facing freelancers in
Scottish Film and TV: an analysis of 45
years of data from the Film Bang
directory 1976-2020

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Abstract

This Discussion Paper investigates freelance working in the Scottish film and television sector. The Industrial Strategy and the Bazalgette Report into the Creative Industries (2017) have identified the need to support the development of creative clusters in other regions outside London and the south east of England in order that the creative industries grow more equally across the UK. This paper examines how a nascent cluster of freelancers was vital to the establishment of this regional hub for film and television production. It goes on to examine the barriers and challenges freelancers face in order to sustain lasting careers. We assess how these have impacted in the past and how these challenges and barriers currently limit growth. Drawing on the historical case study of the Film Bang directory of freelancers in Scotland this paper investigates evidence from the bottom up identifying strategies for resilience and longevity for this workforce.

Key Words: creative freelancers, film, career barriers, Film Bang, screen industry, Scotland

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Introduction

“Scotland’s film and TV workforce is recognised globally for its excellence, diversity, capacity and adaptability, across all grades and genres” – (Screen Scotland Report 2020: 1)

The Scottish screen sector has a well-established reputation as a regional creative cluster of production including feature films, high-end television drama, and other genres of television programming. Launched in 1976, Film Bang was a manifesto calling for investment in the indigenous Scottish screen industry (Petrie, 2000). For the past 45 years the annual directories, and since 2008 the associated website, have provided a resource for freelancers and for employers in the Scottish screen industries. Previous research has highlighted the dearth of robust evidence and official data about the freelance workforce in the creative industries (Carey, Florisson, & Giles 2019). This paper is a ‘deep-dive’ bringing together longitudinal data from this unofficial source to investigate the challenges faced by individual freelancers in one regional creative cluster and identify ways to support career longevity.

Using the data published between 1976-2020 we track the development of the Scottish ‘community of practice’ over four decades. A picture of career patterns emerges which allows us to identify issues that impact on sustainability and resilience for freelance careers. The quantitative data from the directories is supplemented by qualitative evidence from an on-line survey and from 18 semi-structured interviews. The findings identify challenges to be considered by Government and the industry in order to widen access, promote diversity and support progression and survival for successful, long-term freelance careers in film and television. Some issues, for example a shortage of studio facilities, may be specific to the Scottish situation, but the findings are also relevant to supporting the growth of regional screen clusters in other parts of the UK. Reports such as the Skills Audit of the UK Film and Screen Industry (Work Foundation for the BFI 2017) and Scotland’s Screen Skills Research (2019) point to current skills shortages due to changing technology, work practices and production job roles. The need to address training and up-skilling the workforce, and to introduce strategic policies to improve diversity of recruitment and support career resilience has been highlighted in recent research (Giles, Spilsbury & Carey, 2020). It is acknowledged that tackling the regional inequality of the distribution of

creative industry activity across the UK is a major policy issue that does not have a 'quick fix' (Tether, 2019). The shortages highlight the need to understand better 'how to build a critical mass of talent outside London and the south-east' as well as 'the need to understand more about the Scottish screen workforce' (Scottish Screen, 2017).

Our qualitative research was carried out during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic March – September 2020. Survey and interview responses give a clear indication of the strain freelancers experienced under lockdown, comparatively unsupported by UK Government schemes. While these circumstances might be viewed as exceptional our findings indicate that many of the underlying problems have been exposed as structural. The paper compares our findings with research into other regional screen sectors such as Go West! Bristol's Film and Television Industries (Spicer & Presence, 2017) investigating the film and television production in the region around Bristol and including detailed information about freelancers in that city 2016-17.

Research Aims

This paper seeks to examine the barriers to entry and the challenges in a regional screen sector as described by freelancers themselves. Barriers such as: the low paid or unpaid entry process; 'word of mouth' recruitment; geographical obstacles; the lack of industry support for carers which also sets a barrier for people re-entering the sector. Challenges such as: lack of job security; irregular, long, unsocial hours; poor work/life balance; lack of clear career paths for progression. Our aim is to identify how some freelancers have sustained long-lasting work histories in order to inform policy that can support longevity of careers and build a resilient regional hub.

Methodology

We manually transcribed data from printed directories to create an anonymised database to track the evolution of this regional workforce. There have been 3634 individuals listed in total in 41 Film Bang directories 1976-2020. Our database records the years these individuals appear and documents their job roles, enabling us to analyse the growth and fluctuation of those listed in different departments and interpret the evidence regarding the longevity of careers. The quantitative data is supported by two qualitative projects. 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of freelancers who have engaged with Film Bang for varying periods of

time – from a veteran Director of Photography, first listed as a Camera Assistant in 1976, to a representative of the New Entrants joining in 2019. The respondents (9 men, 9 women) from a variety of departments have given accounts of their personal work histories. They share the individual strategies that have sustained their careers. In July-August 2020 we conducted an anonymous online survey directed to the freelancers currently listed in Film Bang which was publicised through other industry organisations including the trade union BECTU. There were over 160 responses submitted.

Fragmentary Data

This study is the first time that longitudinal evidence has been gathered to analyse the Scottish screen workforce. There have been UK national surveys of freelancers such as the Creative Skillset Audit (biennially from 2003-2015) and the BFI Tracking Project (1999) and the BFI Statistical Yearbooks, however it is acknowledged that “there is very limited reliable and consistent data on the sector, its value and trends in Scotland” (Creative Scotland, 2017). Previous Scottish surveys such as the Hydra Report (1996), David Graham Associates Report (2003), Scottish Government Report (2003), and BOP Consulting (2014) focused on the local production companies and broadcasters and their aspirations for growth and drew rough estimates of the size of the local freelance workforce based upon UK national figures.

Freelance employment is integral to the composition of the creative industries across the UK “31% of people working in the Creative Industries work on a self-employed basis, compared to 15% across the economy as a whole” (Giles, Spilbury, Carey, 2020: 10). The current conceptualisation of a ‘Creative Industries’ sector dates back to the late 1990s and policy initiatives by the New Labour Government that recognised the importance and growing contribution to the UK economy of businesses operating across film, television, photography, music, publishing, fashion, and museums and galleries. These were specifically defined by the DCMS in 1998 as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity and talent” (Bakhshi, 2020).

Our research into the Scottish film and television sub-sector reveals how, pre-dating the recent policy focus on the creative industries, the last two decades of the 20th century were a time of significant expansion for the development of this regional sector. The data from Film Bang marks a starting point of 11 local production companies and 66 freelance crew in 1976. In the following years there were

significant successes for both feature film and television production with sustained growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The stimulus of funding from Channel 4 from 1982 onwards resulted in the Scottish screen sector developing as a pathfinder creative cluster. By 1986 the sector had grown to 29 production companies with a freelance workforce of 197; by 1996 there were 62 Scottish independent production companies and 535 freelancers. The highpoint for company listings was reached in 2001 with 87 companies. The highest number of freelancers listed was 804 in 2004 by which time the number of companies had fallen to 74. Throughout this period Film Bang was central to the identity of this workforce:

FilmBang – a directory and network:

- "Being in it you felt you were part of the Scottish production community"
- "Everyone talked about Film Bang. It was hugely important to have your name listed somewhere people would recognise – your presence in the industry was known and felt. In the days before email when you were still posting off your CV to people it was a huge resource"
- "It's on my desk – and every other Production Coordinator in Scotland"
- "It made me feel validated as a professional and helped me familiarise myself with who works in the Scottish industry"

With email contact addresses, mobile phone numbers and company websites becoming universal from the late 1990s onwards the Film Bang directory became less essential, both as a list of industry contacts and as a means of networking. This may be one of the reasons that numbers dip after 2004. Film Bang launched its own website in 2008 and all the listings information has also been online since then. In the past ten years a number of UK agents and commercial organisations have been established to broker freelance recruitment across the screen industries. Film Bang is now one network alongside other groups: organisations such as The Talent Manager, and social media peer-to-peer groups including the Facebook Group 'Film & TV Jobs in Scotland'. With other estimates indicating a higher level of growth for the Scottish freelance sector from 2011-2020 it is likely that some Scottish freelancers no longer choose to list themselves in Film Bang and are now using other platforms to promote themselves and to find work. Nevertheless, Film Bang does present a longitudinal picture of the evolution of this regional screen industry workforce.

Screen Freelancers

In Scotland anchor organisations such as BBC Scotland and Scottish Television have relied upon a freelance workforce in order to have the flexible capacity to adjust to fluctuating demand for production. The current business model for broadcasters and the independent production companies depends on this cohort of production and technical personnel engaged to work on short fixed-term contracts but only during periods of production which are often seasonal. Earlier studies have questioned the degree of autonomy self-employed and freelance workers genuinely have, while also pointing to the increased risks of financial insecurity, isolation and exploitative working conditions driven by the structure and organisation of work (Alacovska, 2018; Butler and Russell, 2018; Giles, Spilsbury & Carey, 2020:10). Our qualitative evidence reveals that rather than simply supporting the need for skills and talent development there is a need to tackle job insecurity and working conditions in order to support longevity of career.

Job uncertainty for freelancers:

- "The industry is so fragile with such dependence on freelance crewing"
- "Lack of year-round employment"
- "You need a good 6 months of savings and have to be comfortable with financial insecurity"
- "Maybe there's a different business model so that life isn't so precarious. To be resilient is really hard"
- "There's a lack of year-round employment. Generally no substantive production work until April. Crew members generally have to work away in order to have year-round work"
- "You can be really talented but if you're not able to make contacts and network you're not going to get work."

Previous research has noted the "failure of official data to provide data granularity at a level that allows analysis of specific sub-sectors, occupations, or spatial areas." (Carey et al 2019). Our research has examined a dataset which does offer granularity at a regional and role specific level, but it is still proving challenging to fully understand because the official data sources for the numbers of freelancers employed in the Scottish Screen sector vary considerably. Creative Scotland's Screen Unit Collaborative Proposal December 2017 states: "... there is very limited reliable and consistent data on the sector, its value and trends in Scotland. The continuing absence of credible and current evidence on the demographics and skills levels of the workforce has presented particular challenges." (Creative Scotland, 2017: 19)

The recent report on the Bristol screen cluster also highlights that collecting accurate data on the sector is a priority:

“Reliable and up-to-date data about regional production spend in the film and television industries both in Bristol and in other UK regions should be provided by the British Film Institute and Ofcom in collaboration with the Local Enterprise Partnerships” (2017, Spicer & Presence: 56).

In order to devise policy measures that will address the barriers to growth in the sector and benefit the freelancers in these categories it will be essential to find ways to gather consistent and reliable records of the sector.

Evolution and Characteristics of the Scottish Screen Cluster

Our analysis traces the development of a nascent creative cluster. The first Film Bang directory, published in January 1976, was the work of the Scottish freelance branch of ACTT (the Association of Cinema and Television Technicians) seeking to influence UK funding policies. At that time the film and television industry was regulated as a pre-entry unionised closed shop with entry to working in the industry, job roles and grades, departmental hierarchies, progression, crewing levels, hours of work and pay rates controlled by the union. This remained the situation from the mid-1970s up to 1990 when the closed shop was abolished in the Employment Act 1990.

Fig 1: Film Bang Freelancers by Year

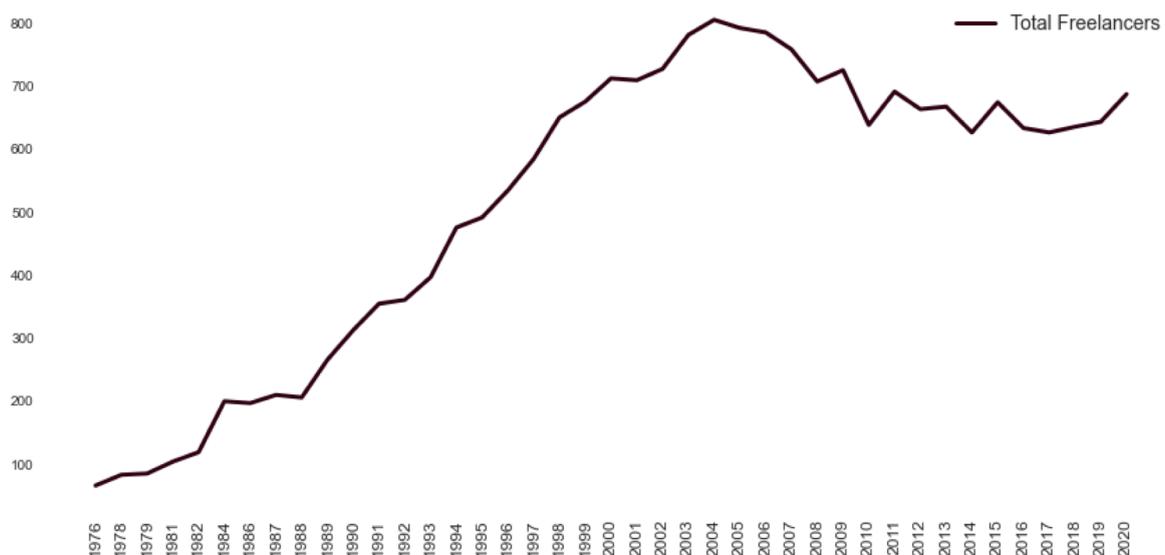


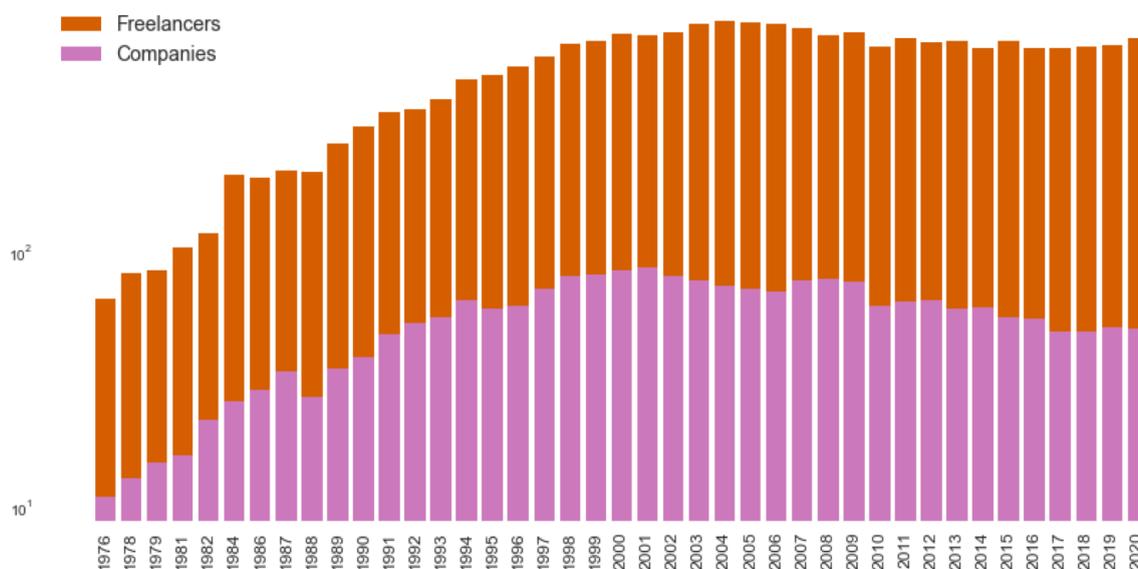
Fig 1.0 reveals the rate of growth of freelancers in Film Bang. For the first 14 years this freelance workforce operated within the regulated unionised framework. This coincided with significant expansion and the graph traces steady growth of the numbers of freelancers from 66 listed in 1976, to 197 in 1986, with 313 by 1990. Over the following decade with de-regulation and the expansion of independent production the rate of growth accelerated with the freelance workforce increasing in a decade by over 123% to 713 in 2000. From 1989 up to 2004 the graph reveals constant steep growth reaching a high point of 804 in 2004. During the early period Film Bang was vital for freelancers staying in contact with production companies.

Film Bang: Networking and getting known:

- "It's somewhere people can go to get my CV"
- "I think it's a really good resource. It's the first place that people look"
- "It shows the depth of the sector here for anyone coming to film in Scotland"
- "It's changed now since I was first in – the ecology of the business is different"
- "Now it's a bit of nostalgia. I don't think I'll get a job because of Film Bang. But I'm still getting listed because I want it to be known that I'm still in Scotland. I'm a Scottish AD"

Analysis of the number of Scottish independent production companies shows a similar pattern of growth and fluctuating gradual decline as the number of SMEs and microbusinesses falls after 2004.

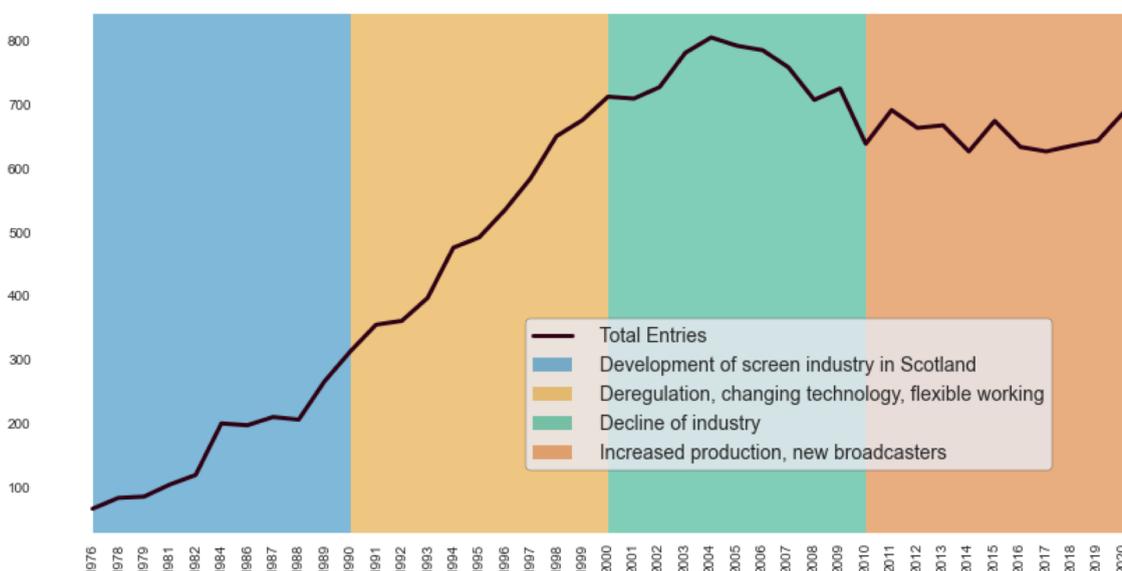
Fig 2: Freelancers and Companies by Year



External Contexts for Growth and for Decline

We have identified four distinct periods where external factors have influenced the shape of development.

Fig 3: External Contexts by Year



1976-1989 – the Scottish screen sector as a pathfinder ‘creative cluster’

The impetus behind the launch in 1976 came from freelance members of the ACTT union. Over the next few years their aspirations for an indigenous film industry were realised with the development of a proto-type screen industry creative cluster for

Scotland with feature film and television production supported by inward investment such as by Channel 4 and Goldcrest Films.

1990-1999 - De-regulation, accelerating growth, new technology and flexible work practices

The 1990 Broadcasting Act led to an increased quota of independently produced programmes not just for Channel 4 but also for the BBC and ITV and local independent production companies such as The Comedy Unit, Tern Television, Wark Clements, and Ideal World consolidated their portfolios to include a number of returning series. Production of major feature films in Scotland continued. There were new, more flexible working arrangements and many of the previous barriers to entry ceased to operate. This is reflected in the number of freelance entries in Film Bang continuing to grow.

2000-2009 – Uncertainty leads to stalled growth and stagnation for the industry in Scotland

The number of entries in Film Bang peaks in 2004 at 804 falling in the following years to a low of 639 in 2010. The 2003 Communication Act led to the transformation of the ITV system. After several years of expansion STV, the Scottish ITV franchise-holder, had become overstretched and vulnerable and lost key returning network commissions, such as Taggart and High Road, that had previously provided regular work for freelancers. This was a period when there was also a decline in BBC network commissions made in Scotland. At the same time there were fewer feature films being made in Scotland and the national agency, Scottish Screen, went through a period of instability. This also marked a period of merger and acquisition in the wider UK independent sector with the creation of a number of 'super-indies'. No Scottish company grew into a 'super-indy' and none has established their HQ in Scotland although from time to time several have set up Scottish regional offices.

2010-2020 – Increased production, new broadcasters, gradual restoration of workforce

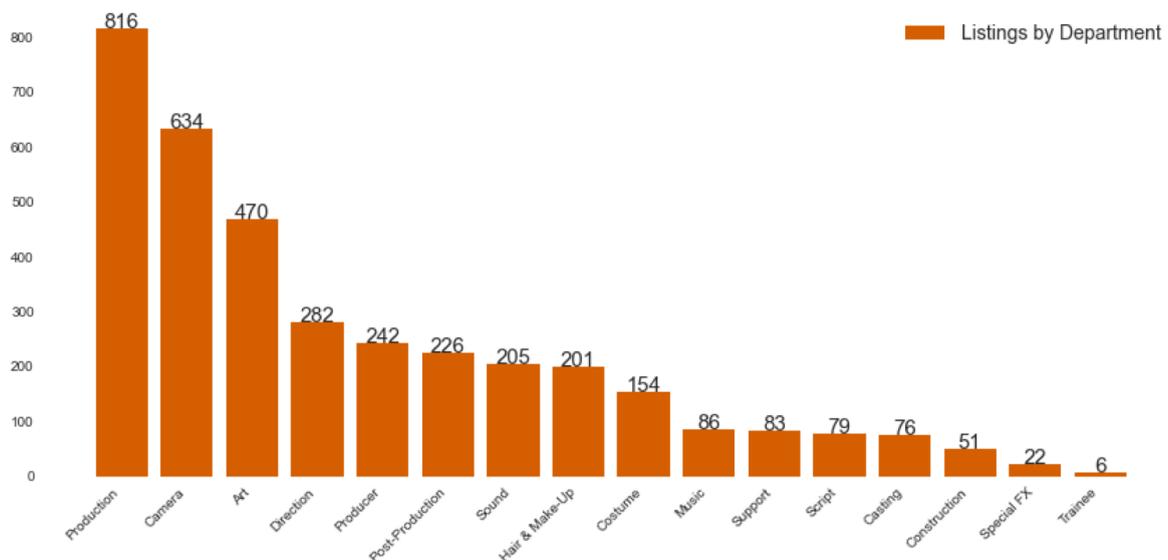
Since 2010 the workforce registered with Film Bang has levelled at around 650. This reflects a gradual restoration of production and some significant high-budget incoming productions such as the Outlander series (2014-present) made by Left Bank Productions and Sony Pictures for the US Starz network, and The Outlaw King (2018) made by Sigma Films for Netflix. However, as noted earlier other sources, such as the ONS, point to higher growth for the sector during this period, with the impact of

freelance crew networking via social media groups the Film Bang directory is no longer a comprehensive record of the Scottish freelance community.

Composition and characteristics of the Scottish regional workforce

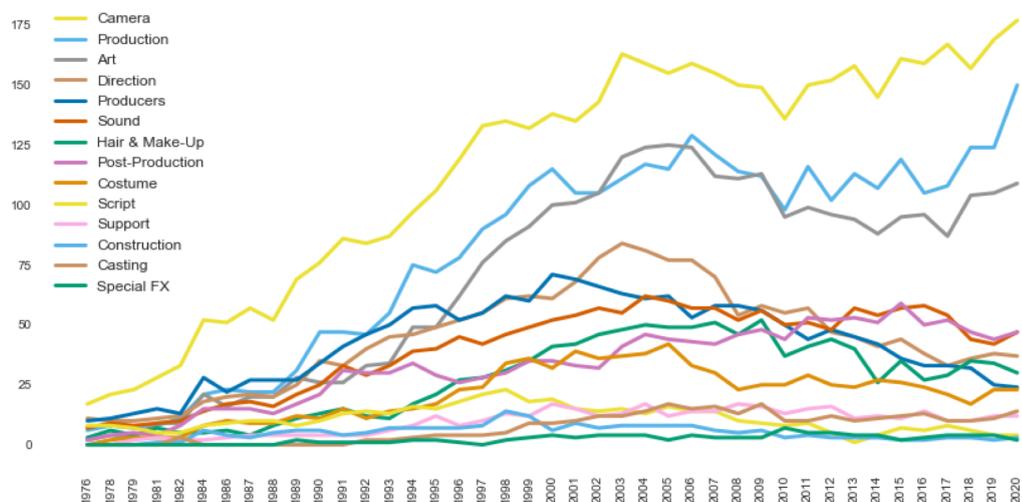
Analysis of the historic data from Film Bang presents a picture of the composition of the Scottish workforce indicating the relative numbers of freelancers in different job roles across the key departments. Freelancers in this regional sector worked across all types of production including feature films; high-end television drama; other TV genres; documentary films; commercials; and corporate industrial films, with many freelancers working across more than one specialist area. The community of practice is embedded in, and interdependent with, the larger employers in the sector. It is a porous industry where the freelance workforce moves between jobs with the broadcasters, BBC Scotland and STV, and working for independent production companies.

Fig 4: Numbers listed by department



Production is the largest department as it includes many varied roles. It is a department common to all types of production, film and television, drama, documentary and other genres. Evidence from the interviews confirms that this is the department from which incoming productions are most likely to recruit local crew in the roles required to manage location filming and in administrative support. The analysis shows the growth and fluctuation of people listing in different departments. Those departments in which freelance contracts are most common, Camera, Production and the Art Department show the highest number of entries.

Fig 5: Department numbers by Year



Although a greater total number of the cohort are listed in the Production department the year-by-year numbers show higher numbers in the Camera department. This is a result of the higher level of churn in Production. New entries, newcomers and runners are entry roles and are listed under Production. The crew with specialist skills in the Camera department are more likely to remain in freelance positions as a result of how the industry is structured. Our interview evidence supports this although a number of senior camera and sound personnel also point to the importance of making themselves mobile and 'available for work anywhere' in order to progress and remain in the industry. The numbers listed in Post-production do not reflect the strength of local editors with significant numbers of previously freelance editors recruited by the broadcasters and local facilities companies. The year-by-year numbers for departments such as Construction and Special Effects are very low.

The Freelance Career Journey

Barriers to entry

It is acknowledged by the industry that it is hard to get started working in the screen sector (Carey, Crowley, Dudley, Sheldon and Giles, 2017). It is highly competitive and there are barriers making it hard for all new entrants but in particular for women, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. To make these jobs more attractive there needs to be greater transparency for potential recruits about how the industry is structured, the varied range of different roles and information about the career

pathways. All new entrants report that this is an industry where having prior work experience is often stated as a prerequisite for any job application with employers wanting junior staff to come with some relevant skills. For all new entrants during the first period of freelance work the challenge is to get known in a sector where knowledge of upcoming jobs has traditionally been by word of mouth through informal networks rather than through formal advertising and publicity.

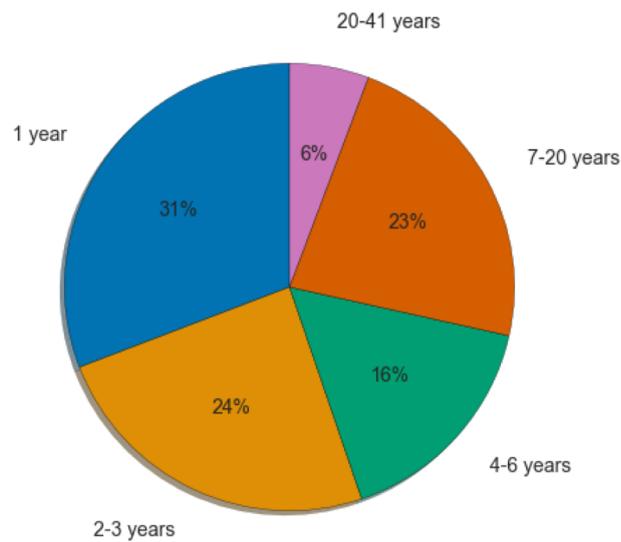
Getting started:

- “Everybody's way in is different”
- “By sheer chance and luck I saw a crew call advert on the Creative Scotland website”
- “I got a uni placement at the BBC and then two weeks at IWC plus working on self-funded stuff. I was just figuring out how to get into the real world”
- “I think there's a lack of understanding of all the avenues, there's probably a role for everyone”
- “Back at uni I got some work experience with a facilities house. It was great seeing the set-up. After I left university I wasn't really aware of the freelance nature of the job – since I've been in BECTU I've been more aware of things”
- “I saw 1st ADs looking at Film Bang to find 2nd assistants”
- “I use it all the time to hire runners”
- “Luckily I never did dailies. It's incredibly difficult for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to get a foot in because you have to be available for dailies which you can't do if you have to work to survive and can't hang around waiting for a call”

Carey et al discuss the risks of entering the screen industries:

“where work experience is almost essential to gain entry to employment in the sector. The average worker within film must undertake 46 days of unpaid work experience before gaining their first “official” position.....Undergoing two and half months of unpaid work is a mammoth task for anyone without private financial backing, and poses a significant barrier to entry into the screen industry” (Carey, Crowley, Dudley & Giles, 2017: 11). Newcomers are most vulnerable at a point in their careers where job uncertainty is greatest. This results in a very high level of attrition with new entrants failing to get established and leaving the industry. The data in Film Bang confirms this with 31% of those listed dropping out after only one year and approximately 24% listing for only 2-3 years. That means 55% leave after the first 3 years.

Fig 6: Length of listing in Film Bang



For some the experience of the precarity of this career will lead them to give up and search for more secure employment. For others their listing will have led to sufficient freelance experience that they are successful in gaining staff posts with broadcasters or independent production companies. Others may move to different parts of the UK having gained the initial profile required to get work in a busier creative hub.

Fig 7: New entries and dropouts by Year



Other reasons for dropout can include becoming sufficiently well-established that there is no longer the need for a listing to find work, choosing alternative methods of advertising through an agent or talent manager, leaving the industry to work in a different sector, or retirement. The pattern for dropouts varies across departments with some roles offering more stability than others. Statistical analysis of the probability of dropping out of the various departments using Kaplan-Meier estimates (see Appendix Fig 1.0) shows Sound had the least risk of dropping out. Camera, Producer, Art and Direction show a gradual increase of risk. Post-production, Hair & Make-Up, Costume, Script and Support lie in the middle of the range, while Casting, Production, Special FX mark the tendency towards increased risk with Construction and Music showing higher risk. In general these issues should be seen as sectoral and something the industry as a whole should tackle.

Challenges mid-career

The survey and interview responses outline in detail the types of challenges individual freelancers face in order to stay in this workforce.

Working Conditions:

- "The working hours are brutal. On I was dressing extras at 3 in the morning and didn't switch off the laptop until 8 in the evening"
- "It's a hellish industry regarding care for its workforce, I think it's possibly one of the worst. Long hours, pretty unchecked work practices, family unfriendly, holiday unfriendly, no nurturing of careers as many are freelance, have seen some very talented older people over the years left feeling isolated and useless"
- "Crazy hours, complicated workflow – one of those jobs where you check out of your life for 6 weeks"

The problem of maintaining a healthy work/life balance was raised by many respondents. There were numerous responses pointing to how freelance working in the screen sector is currently incompatible with caring responsibilities. The challenge of returning to freelance work after a career-break was also frequently seen as unsurmountable. This leads to a talent drain with many people with skills and experience effectively unable to continue or return.

Caring Responsibilities:

"The screen sector is not child-friendly for working mothers. At all."

"I found working as a freelance Production Coordinator incompatible with my caring responsibilities as a mother due to the inflexibility of the workplace and long working hours culture"

"Working hours on set are not family friendly"

"With the arrival of my first child I'm already experiencing job offers being affected by the fact I'm a parent",

"It was not possible to keep working in the screen sector once I had children"

"I wanted to get back into the business but only if I could depend on regular hours"

These challenges are not limited to the Scottish regional hub the Bristol Report also points to the challenge in improving equality in the industry when it is perceived that it is so difficult for freelancers who have any caring responsibility (Spicer & Presence, 2017: 51)

Regional Challenges:

- "Many productions seem to hire crew from outside the local area (mostly from London)"

- "Lack of homegrown rainmakers, meaning that most productions are spawned by companies outside of Scotland, heads of departments are few and far between in Scotland as they are all brought in from elsewhere and the Scottish ones work abroad, or elsewhere."

- "Lack of commitment from broadcasters to developing local talent and supporting a sustainable indie film sector" "...no studios / stages - so very difficult for construction and big / longer productions with money to spend on construction to base jobs in Scotland."

- "A lack of suitable studio space. It has been the single, most detrimental, element behind the lack of growth in the Scottish film industry..... we are alone in lacking this..... Manchester, Belfast, the South, Wales all have several studios."

Many respondents suggested that it can be difficult to progress without taking work in other parts of the country. Some stated that there are difficulties when London-based companies and broadcast executives do not recognise the professional standing and capability of the Scottish workforce in senior roles. The frequency that this was emphasised in interviews would support the view that there continues to be scepticism from metropolitan commissioners and financiers, with freelancers based in Scotland finding that they need to have proved themselves all

over again in London. Without changes to institutional attitudes this will continue to hinder growth outside the south-east of England. There are signs that broadcasters and other sections of the industry are prepared to implement new initiatives that could start to redress this by moving out of London such as the Channel 4 HQ in Leeds and their regional hub in Glasgow. It will take time to track the impact of these moves on commissioning and spend but the moves do have an impact on the confidence of the sector in these regions. The shortage of film studios in Scotland was raised. There have been recent initiatives and a new studio in Leith Docks, Edinburgh, with Screen Scotland support, has a first high-end television drama in production in 2021.

Sustaining Longevity of career

The Film Bang listings reveal that despite the high rate of attrition there are a significant number of freelancers who have had lasting careers over the past four decades. Of the 45% who remain in the directory for more than 3 years 16% sustain a listing for 4-6 years, and 29% (1035) remain in the directory for 7 or more years. There are 10% (357) of entries who have careers longer than 15 years, and 6% (207) are listed for over 20 years. These longer careers are essential for sustained growth for any regional screen cluster. In the short-term increased production capacity can be created with freelancers moving to work on short-term contracts away from home, bringing crew from other parts of the UK to work on productions in Scotland. This has always been one way in which the film and television industry has worked for location filming. Long-term dependency upon incoming crew inhibits growth and prevents a regional cluster from nurturing the pool of talent required to support on-going expansion. In order to allow this expansion to continue (or start up once more) it will be essential to support those in mid-career and find ways to keep this skilled workforce in the local industry and support them so they do not either move away permanently or leave the sector.

Fig 9 charts turnover, the way career lengths aggregate over time. The darker trails indicate continuing presence in the directory. The top line gives a picture of the number of new entries for each year the directory was published. Starting with the first cohort of 1976 we can see the rate at which that first group drop out.

After 15 years just under a quarter of the 1976 cohort remain in the directory. A key timeframe to look at for longer careers is around the 7 - 10 years mark. The Film Bang cohorts that have shown the greatest longevity started out in the mid-1990s. After 10 years, cohorts entering from 1994-1997 numbered 36/37, the peak for careers of 10 years, the 1996/97 intake marks the peak for longevity. The highest intake (aside from the outlier of 2019) was 1999 but this did not amount to a comparably long-lasting cohort.

Looking along the row for career length of 20 years there are 11 people in 2020 with this length of career, and 11 people in 1999 when it was first possible to have been in the directory for that long. The total of 20 year careers peaks in 2016 with 21 people having this length of career (mostly starting out in the 96/97 cohort). There was a suitable level of ongoing production activity meaning that freelancers could get established and make it worth maintaining a listing in Film Bang. They had progressed to a level at which they continued to secure work and survive in the industry despite the challenges of a downturn in production in the early 2000s.

Strategies for resilience and survival

The survey and interview responses make it evident that longevity of career requires determination and resilience with a strong personal commitment to remaining in the industry. The comments highlight a range of individual strategies and the verbatim answers indicate a tone of resignation and perseverance.

Strategies for survival:

- “Keeping in touch with all of my professional contacts to update them with my availability for any jobs they might have”
- “Maintaining a high standard of work, which leads to word-of-mouth referrals.
- “Trying not to get pigeonholed in one genre so making deliberate choices to maintain a diverse CV”
- “Resilience. Willingness to take risks and try new things”
- “Working hard and maintaining a good relationship with people I work with.”
- “Being open to work at any budget level. Being prepared to work hard, be uncomfortable, hungry, tired, and trying to remain cheerful whilst doing so. Abandoning all notions of a regular life outside work”
- “Never take a holiday!”

Although most crew in Film Bang are seeking work locally, nevertheless some of the personnel listed are based in Scotland but spend most of their time working in other parts of the UK and overseas. The qualitative evidence reveals this is especially true for senior creative roles across both production, editorial and technical departments. Being mobile and able to work outside Scotland is an essential strategy for those heads of department to progress to higher quality, higher budget productions.

Mobility:

- “Being prepared to move around to facilitate work “
- “Extreme flexibility regarding location of work.
- Maintaining good contacts across the industry.
- Being good at my job.”

Developing skills in money management and financial planning was seen as essential and an area where the workforce could benefit from ongoing training and support. A number of interviewees raised the idea that they expected that their freelance career would necessarily only be for a short-term duration and that they expected to move on, “settling down” in their thirties suggested they would need a less uncertain work life with regular hours and better working conditions. Others who had sustained long careers talked about the challenge of finding a suitable exit strategy in order to pivot to a different career. A number of respondents have moved away from freelance work in the screen sector to work in related careers as

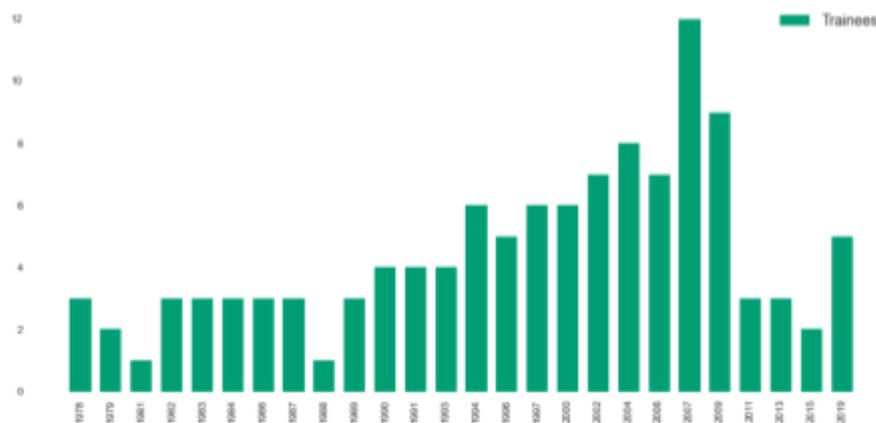
administrators in training and higher education on courses related to film and television.

Many cited mentoring relationships as an important form of on-going support, although often this was arranged informally rather than through a formal scheme. This was seen to be valuable at all stages of career and not just for new entrants. The interviewees were also all well aware of issues that have been raised about the sector such as skills gaps due to changing technologies and business models. A feature of the Covid-19 lockdown was that many had taken advantage of online training offered through bodies such as BECTU, Producers Association for Cinema and Television (PACT), Screen Skills and the craft associations such as the Production Guild, the British Film Designers Guild, and the Art Directors Guild. These organisations continue to be important networks for job roles in these categories. Many raised the issue that, without employer support, accessing training was difficult to balance with being available for work. Also self-funding training could be challenging when the only time available to undertake the training was during a gap in employment when finances were stretched. There are no quick fixes in any of these strategies that will support growth in this regional screen cluster with certain success, however there are examples of interventions by the wider industry that produce benefits for all, for the individual freelancer, and for the local industry.

Case Study: Trainee Schemes

One industry intervention that has had demonstrable success is the long-established 'Trainee Programme' for the industry in Scotland. This is confirmed by analysis of *Film Bangin* parallel with the information from the 'Generation Nets, 30 Years in the Making' (Report by Kay Sheridan for Creative Scotland 2009), which tracked trainee careers from 1979-2009. The Scottish screen sector has had a commitment to developing trainee routes into the industry that date back to 1978 and was one of the early initiatives coming out of the creation of *Film Bang*. The programme was first established by the Scottish Film Council working with ACTT. In the early 1980s funding from Goldcrest Films helped establish the Scottish Film Training Trust. More recently this training has been coordinated by the Screen Nets programme. Our database was able to track the careers of many of these trainees. As shown in the chart below numbers are relatively low (1-12 trainees per annum), however these traineeships certainly have led to sustained careers. In a number of cases trainees progress to take senior leadership

Fig 10: Trainee programme numbers



Longevity and sustainability for freelancers with this point of entry was evident. For example the trainees from 1978 went on to mean length of career of over 26 years, those from 1979 for 19 years, from 1981 for 29 years. The three trainees from 1986 had average careers of over 23 years. There is also evidence of the sustained survival of trainees in general (see Appendix Fig 2.0). The strategy of well-supported training programmes which give trainees a living wage throughout the duration of their training, so that job insecurity is removed, has been proved to deliver good results. These freelancers have subsequently been offered ongoing targeted support, mentoring and advice which has been proved to assist career progression and talent retention. This continues with 24 trainees recruited to the Screen Nets programmes in 2021. The success of this bespoke sector wide programme contrasts with the difficulties when training is left to individual companies: "take-up of apprenticeships remains low, in part as a consequence of the distinct structure and characteristics of the creative industries and economy. Given the sector is dominated by SMEs and micro businesses, short-term project-based working and freelancing, businesses will have fewer employees who are eligible to be apprentices and are likely to face additional challenges in delivering them (Bazalgette 2017). Thus, wide adoption and use is being constrained" (Carey et al 2019 p28).

Impact of COVID-19

Responses to our survey in the summer of 2020 reveal that many Scottish freelancers believe that the pandemic left them more exposed to a more fragile precarious future than even before.

Covid Impact:

"No work, no government support for freelancers, little to no hope of things changing in the near future. Also, concern that productions will cut even more into budgets and crew sizes."

"No way for PAYE freelancers to receive any of the government COVID help."

"Risk, precarious work practices and isolation for the many freelancers."

"Learning to work safely with social distancing."

"Lack of studio space, which would be easier to film in post COVID..... An already low existence of work has meant that many who expect to be out of work November to March, are now perhaps out of work for almost a year."

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the problems caused by various types of 'freelance' identities: from sole traders, to micro-businesses (including personal service limited companies), to individuals recognised by HMRC for tax purposes as PAYE Schedule D self-employed. Many bodies lobbying for freelancers have argued that this patchwork of regulations has resulted in this section of the workforce failing to receive an adequate level of support from Government for the disruption caused by lockdown during the pandemic compared to other parts of the economy. The responses to our online survey show a very mixed range of take-up and success for current Scottish screen industry freelancers applying to the Government's SEISS (Self-employed Income Support Scheme) and other support funds such as the Screen Scotland Bridging Bursary, and the BFI Covid-19 Film & TV Emergency Relief Fund.

BECTU conducted a larger national survey of 5600 creative freelancers in March 2020. The report argues that:

"Like an x-ray revealing skeletal fractures, the pandemic seems to have exposed an array of problematic structural and operational features of the TV industry, not in themselves new, but historically overlooked or individually dismissed as being 'just the way the industry works'. Covid-19

has brought a dawning realisation that, although the UK's film and television sector has reportedly been expanding at more than three times the rate of the wider economy, and generating an annual trade surplus of almost £1 billion, this expansion may have been at the expense of its most valuable resource: its skilled workforce." (BECTU State of Play Survey 2020).

They highlight the brutal impact of the lockdown on this industry but point out that the complexity of employment patterns in the sector "surprised many - not least, the UK Government. What began as alarm about the vulnerability of this workforce has, within a period of ten months, evolved into a much broader conversation about a whole range of systemic employment-related concerns and management practices, exposing some highly problematic aspects of TV work culture." (BECTU State of Play survey 2020)

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Our research shows how job uncertainty and vulnerability for the freelancers in the Scottish screen sector have been built into the way in which the industry is structured. This freelance community was a catalyst for the early growth of this regional creative hub, in order for the hub to recover from the Covid shutdown and grow once more it is essential that the issues that lead to the barriers and challenges and that have hindered sustained careers be addressed by policy makers, the industry as a whole, as well as by the freelance workforce themselves. Our longitudinal research confirms it has been possible for around 30% of those in this cohort to sustain careers lasting over 7 years. Freelancers continue to provide a vital part of the ecosystem of the screen sector. We see them as key because freelancing is a core access route into the industry and provides flexible capacity for production. Supporting the freelance screen workforce is fundamental for the growth and ongoing resilience of regional screen sectors.

The frames within which this structure can be re-designed / re-considered are:

- Regulations and Protections
- Institutional Infrastructure
- Industry Action

Regulations and Protections

Government, industry and other stakeholders should consult to develop regulations and protections to offset the barriers and challenges to sustaining freelance careers in the screen sector. There should be analysis of how the current system has left the workforce vulnerable, highlighted by COVID-19 and the accusation of the UK Government failures to support creative freelancers due to complex regulations regarding employment status. This is about improving working conditions. It is also about recognising and mediating risks, rewards and responsibilities being negotiated between employers and the freelance workforce on which they depend. Critically, the imbalances demonstrated in our findings are also an underlying cause of the lack of diversity in the sector.

Institutional Infrastructure

There are already stakeholders in the sector who seek to provide support for freelancers, such as Screen Scotland, the BFI, BECTU and Screen Skills. This infrastructure is engaged in multiple overlapping ways; lobbying, training, funding, mediating. If we see a focus for intervention here it is that these bodies take account of the responsibilities at stake and work to distribute these rather than focusing them on freelancers. For example, regarding training this tends to be offered directly to freelancers to self-fund in order to develop their portfolio of skills. We would advocate developing ways to make training and skills development a sector wide responsibility.

We propose investigating more contemporary models of (creative) clusters: incubator hubs and start-up communities can be adapted to offer a useful model. Finding the balance between flexibility and growth is difficult but there are good Scottish examples in the technology and creative sectors, such as Codebase in Edinburgh (and beyond) and The Whisky Bond in Glasgow who incorporate training, mentoring and skills development in their model while simplifying the material requirements of business development. Translating and adapting these models over to the screen sector represents a progressive opportunity. The advent of a new studio in Scotland provides a prime opportunity to look at developing the above scheme/structure.

Industry Action

The business model for the broadcasters and production companies relies upon having a pool of freelance labour to draw on during production. This is true at all levels of production, from small single television programme commissions, through recurring network series, to high-end drama and feature films. The conclusion from this interdependency is that the responsibility for finding ways to improve resilience and sustainability should lie with the entire sector. The industry itself has an important role to play in addressing:

- trainee programmes,
- hiring practices,
- supporting networks,
- investing in the skills development of a shared labour pool,
- dramatically improving working practices, example those with caring responsibilities,
- enabling and supporting progression and advancement.

Training on the job for example shares the onus for training between production and freelancers and ensures the training is fit for purpose. This is also about making connections between more experienced workers (giving the training) and those at a different stage in their development: circumstantial networking and mentoring is built into a training scheme, again shifting the weight off the individual.

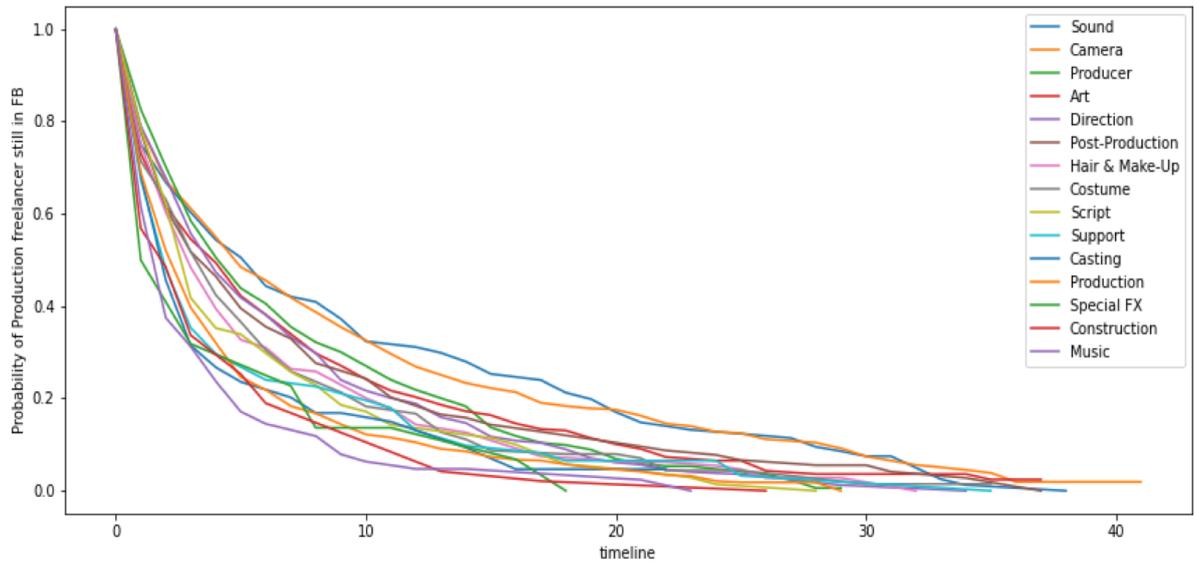
The argument for transparent recruitment practices comes up in the literature and in our survey responses. Transparent recruitment is not just about focusing on entry level roles. Everyone has to benefit from this change if it is to be taken up. So, again, it should apply to all levels of career progression.

Appendix

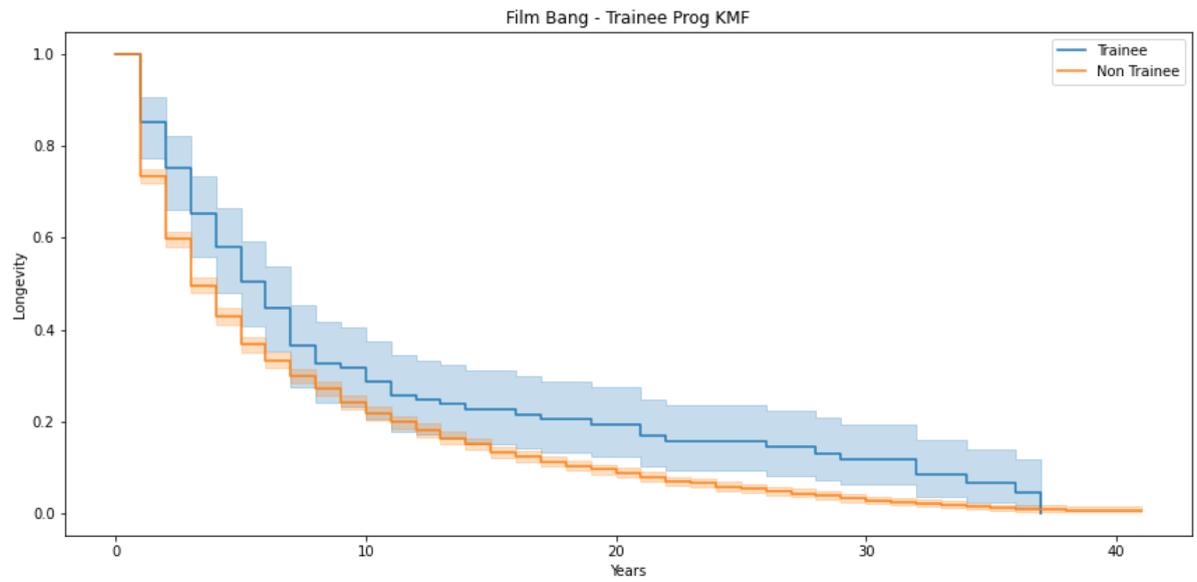
Caveats with the Data

The official longitudinal data tracking the self-employed workforce is acknowledged to be fragmentary and inconsistent (Carey et al, 2019). The data in Film Bang provides evidence giving a broad picture of this regional sub-sector. A listing is never proof of actually gaining work in the screen industry so there are some caveats when interpreting the data. The directories record freelancers who have advertised their availability to provide services in a specific job role. In order to assess the gender split of the cohort we have inferred this information based on differentiation by name prior to anonymization and on anecdotal evidence. Also, with regard to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, since at the time of creating the listings no relevant information was collected, we are not able to track diversity regarding ethnicity, disability, age, or socio-economic background. For the early period 1976-1990 when Film Bang was organised through the ACTT Scottish Freelance Branch we are confident that the directories provide a comprehensive listing of the Scottish freelance community within the unionised structure of the industry. Since 1990 a listing in the directory has required individual freelancers to submit their details and pay a subscription (currently £45 per annum with a discounted rate of £10 for New Entrants). The information was checked by the team editing the directory to ensure that the claims for professional credits and working grade were verifiable. To confirm an entry required proof of previous work such as copies of Film Crew Lists and Production Call Sheets. Given this level of scrutiny we believe that these annual listings give a reliable representation of the trends for the sector. Certainly in the years before emails, internet search, and social media platforms this printed directory was an indispensable resource for crewing up productions and it provided a vital tool for networking for both new entrants and more established freelancers.

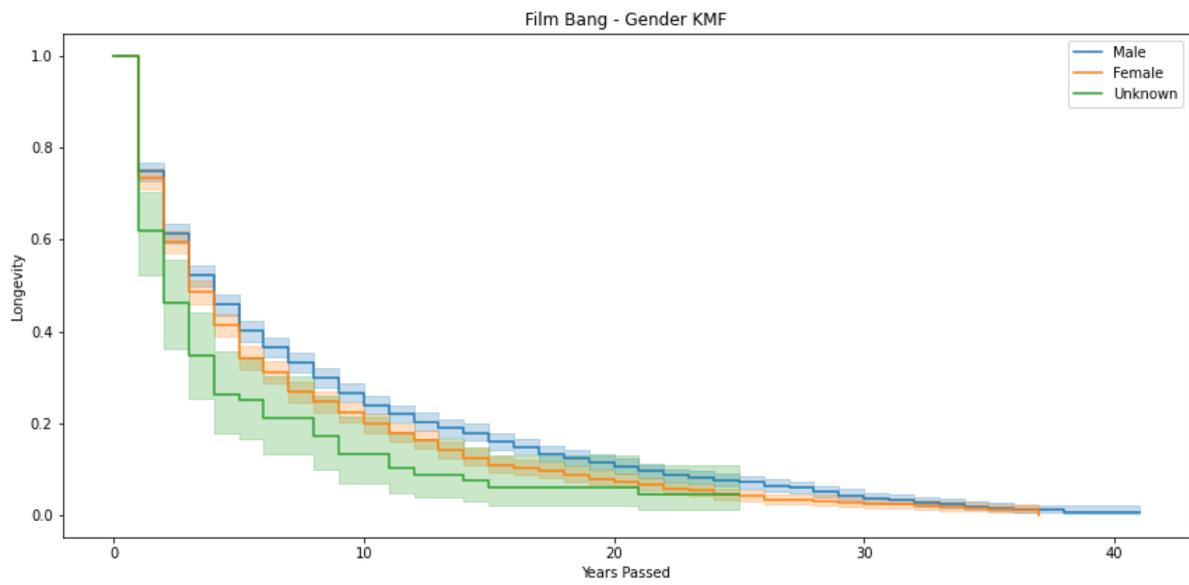
Appendix Fig 1.0 Kaplan-Meier Estimate – Role Category / Department



Appendix Fig 2.0 Kaplan-Meier Estimate – Scottish Film Industry 'Trainee Program'



Appendix Fig 3.0 Shows freelancers who took part in the Scottish Film Industry Trainee Program.



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