



# UK film and TV industry slowdown: a sector in crisis

A Bectu report • Feb 2024

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# Industry slowdown 2024 – Executive summary

A slowdown across film, TV and commercial production and commissioning in the UK is leaving huge numbers of people out of work. The screen industry is heavily reliant on a freelance workforce, many of whom have not had any work at all for months on end, leaving a devastating impact on the financial and mental wellbeing of thousands.

This crisis highlights not just the fragility of the industry, but poses an existential threat to it, with huge proportions of the workforce planning to leave film and TV employment altogether. Women and people of colour even more likely to feel pushed out from the environment of precarity, suggesting a step backwards in industry diversity.

A Bectu survey of 4,160 film and TV workers carried out between 9-16 February 2024 found that:

- 68% of film and TV workers are not currently working, just a small improvement since September 2023 when 74% were out of work.
- 68% report their employment being directly affected by the industry slowdown.
- 88% are concerned about their financial security over the next six months.
- The drop off in work is having a significant impact on the mental health of workers, with 75% reporting that they are struggling with their mental wellbeing.
- There has been an increase in the number of people who are planning to leave the industry within the next five years – from 24% in September 2023 to 37% in February 2024.

# Introduction

The UK film and TV freelance workforce, without whom the industry would not be so economically and creatively successful, and whose skills are recognised as among the best in the world, is in crisis.

In September 2023, amidst the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) industrial action in the US and a wider industry slowdown, Bectu surveyed nearly 4,000 freelance film and TV workers to understand the impact on the UK's film and TV workforce. We found around 80% of the workforce had been directly impacted, taking a huge toll on workers' financial and mental health. Moreover, this was taking place across a backdrop of a wider industry slowdown, with a Bectu poll from May 2023 finding nearly half of UK freelancers working in unscripted TV out of work and three quarters struggling financially.

While the SAG-AFTRA industrial dispute reached a settlement in November 2023, it seems that the impact of the 'perfect storm' that Bectu spoke about last summer will stretch far into 2024. The consequences of the US strikes on budgets and timescales has had a greater effect on inward investment than might have been anticipated.

The funding challenges facing the BBC, which inevitably impact the amount that it can commission, have also long been the subject of discussion and debate. And in the last few weeks, announcements of redundancies at Channel 4 and of a recruitment freeze at ITV suggest that there is a very real crisis in sustainable funding for linear TV, whether it is publicly or commercially funded.

A combination of a significant drop in advertising revenue and an increase in the cost of production have taken a huge toll on freelancers who work primarily on broadcaster-commissioned productions. The impact on indies big and small is also very evident. Progress for subscription video on demand (SVODs) seems also to have stalled as streamers alter their strategies and take less risks.

To take stock of the ongoing slowdown situation, Bectu surveyed 4,160 film and TV workers in February 2024. The results show a shocking drought in work across the scripted, unscripted and commercial sectors. The impact on the financial and mental health of workers is stark, and the findings show a clear existential threat to the industry, with many – especially women and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as those working in unscripted TV – planning to leave film and TV work all together.

If our industry wants to continue to be the best in the world, as Bectu believes it is, then we must all do more to resolve the current crisis and try to address the reasons behind the 'feast or famine' nature of working in the sector. We must do that if we are to halt the exodus of diverse and talented crew and tackle the structural challenges that leave workers feeling isolated, that damage their mental health and devastate their financial security.

The results of our research must prompt the whole sector to think seriously about their responsibilities to their workforce, and we hope will prompt a redoubling of efforts to find lasting solutions.

## A 'booming' industry?

In the same week that Bectu launched our survey, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport declared that British film "is booming like never before"<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the most recent BFI figures<sup>2</sup> show the combined spend by film and high-end television (HETV) production in 2023 reached £4.23 billion, with overall takings at the UK box office up 5.5%. Early

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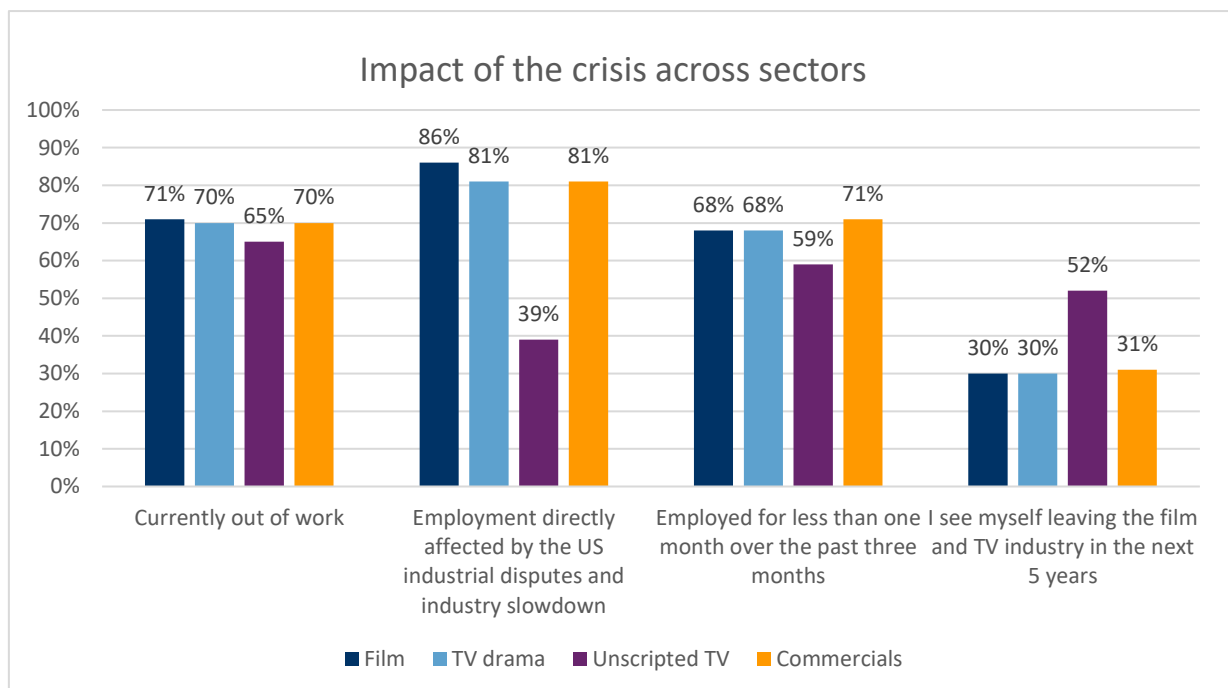
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/britain-film-industry-booming-growth-culture-secretary-lucy-frazer-b1136642.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/official-bfi-2023-statistics>

estimates of gross value added (GVA) for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport show a growth of 10% for the creative industries from pre-pandemic levels, with GVA estimates for ‘film, TV, video, radio and photography’ at £20.8bn in 2022<sup>3</sup>. It is important to note that while this may look like good news, total production spend was significantly down on the year before, hugely impacting Bectu members’ work opportunities.

For workers, these headline figures are totally at odds with their reality. Our survey found that seven in ten (68%) respondents are currently not working, only a tiny decrease from September 2023 (74%), when industry slowdown was largely attributed to the ongoing industrial disputes in the US. In our September survey, 80% of UK industry workers said they were directly impacted by the SAG-AFTRA and/or Writers Guild of America strikes, reflecting the UK’s reliance on US production spend. It is understandable that as negotiations came to a close, production did not immediately spring back – and in our most recent survey, 68% report their employment being directly affected by US industrial action.

But the issues surrounding the industry slowdown are far greater. Our survey highlights the widespread nature of this crisis, with workers across film, TV drama, unscripted TV and commercials all affected. Among those working in unscripted TV, 65% of respondents say they are currently not working, despite 61% saying their employment was not directly impacted by the US industrial disputes and immediate industry slowdown.



Workers are facing a crisis that has a far deeper reach. 58% say they have not seen any recovery in their employment since the end of US industrial action, while 18% have seen a part recovery in their employment. Only 4% report a full bounce back in their employment. And 56% have seen no recovery in their employment since Bectu declared an emergency slowdown of work in the unscripted sector in May 2023, with 19% reporting a part recovery. Only 3% have seen a full recovery in their employment.

The industry is still recovering from the effects of the pandemic, while a slowdown in commissioning from global streamers, a freeze in the BBC licence fee and a downturn in advertising have created a very uncertain landscape. Meanwhile, as inflation has soared, so have production costs, creating a perfect storm.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-and-digital-sector-gva-2022-provisional/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-gross-value-added-2022-provisional>

Furthermore, the government's 11<sup>th</sup> hour intervention, in which it failed to honour the agreed formula for this year's licence fee increase, instead reducing it by a third, would have significantly disrupted plans and budgets – including commissioning budgets – and reduced certainty on longer-term projects.

*"I have never known a more dire situation in television in twenty years. There is zero work around. Every freelancer I know is unemployed. Every freelancer I know is extremely worried about money, growing debt and the future of production. Freelancers are already living precarious lives. Now it is untenable. Production companies seem also to have abandoned loyalty to their hard-working freelancers in favour of extremely cheap, under qualified staff whom they overwork and underpay. The jobs that are advertised seem to roll up about three or four production jobs into one role and the pay is linked to the most junior role. It's sleazy and shortsighted."*

**Unscripted TV producer**

Overall, 30% have had no work at all in the past three months, while 34% have had less than a month's worth of work since November. Of those who are not currently in work, 43% have had no work at all over the past three months, while 38% have had four weeks of work or less.

*"To have given up so much of my life to working in TV (long hours, stressful contracts, weeks away from home) only to find myself finding it impossible to now get work, is the most soul-destroying part. I'm struggling to find an alternative full-time job with my TV CV. I've worked less than six months of this financial year. This is the lowest I've ever felt in all honesty, and completely hopeless for the future. And what is worse is seeing so many others saying the same thing."*

**Unscripted TV producer**

*"The entire industry is suffering, and the freelancers seem to be at the bottom of the priority list for companies. I got hired to work on a production that has been on hold for a month, the company couldn't tell me if I would have a job in two weeks but kept asking me to be flexible. The channel refused to engage with us properly and resulted in a 3-week international shoot having to be turned around in three days. I've applied for over 15 jobs in the last eight weeks, only one got back to me."*

**Unscripted production manager**

Our research highlighted not just the impact of this crisis on workers, but many respondents voiced how a lack of transparency from broadcasters was making it impossible for them to plan for the future. Freelance workers are used to slower periods, and most have become accustomed to adapting for the ups and downs of the industry. But with many having had no work at all for months on end, then having to second guess if, or when, the industry may start to pick up again, this is becoming an unsustainable situation.

*"The broadcasters need to be more transparent about their plans. If there's no commissioning, if there's a strategy change, tell us. Don't keep us holding on."*

**Development producer, unscripted**

*"There are many talented people, senior and junior freelancers working in unscripted, with families to support and mortgages to pay. It's difficult to know without transparency from broadcasters how long to hold out for work in TV or whether to look for alternative work."*

**Series producer/edit producer**

*"The most frustrating thing to have increase is the amount of stringing along done by companies with shaky commissions. Three times in the last six months I've been told to save dates for something which turned out not to be green lit, sometimes with as little as two weeks' notice."*

**Shooting producer/director**

*"The slowdown of commissioning due to various economic factors is not going away. I think the workforce needs to consider income will reduce to around six months a year"*

*or less. It was never stable but I managed to work in TV and have a career for 26 years. I need to get out now and work in something else, hopefully adjacent but this level of activity is unsustainable.”*

**Line producer**

*“The lack of clarity in the commissioning process, and the lack of government support for unscripted freelancers, has been shocking.”*

**Development executive**

The results of our survey paint a bleak picture that questions the very survival of the industry – but also make clear that broadcasters need to take action now to provide clarity for the freelance workforce on which it depends.

## Regional differences

Film and TV has long been considered a notoriously London-centric industry, despite changes over recent decades devolving more production to the regions and nations. But the impact of the current crisis is clearly hitting far beyond the big London studios, with those outside the South East sharing how the crisis is compounding an existing shortage of work.

*“It’s hard working in East Anglia anyway let alone the film industry slowing. I’ve heard and seen so many fellow filmmakers getting low balled from producers knowing people are struggling.”*

**Filmmaker**

*“There are very few jobs in the North West and now that the pandemic is over people are refusing to offer remote working.”*

**Assistant Producer**

Others found that incentives to move production outside of the M25 were either not being properly enforced, or restricting their ability to find employment, making things more difficult for those based in areas where there was already little work.

*“Living and working in Wales has been even more difficult as people who would normally be working in London and Bristol have been getting what little work there has been in Wales.”*

**Costume daily**

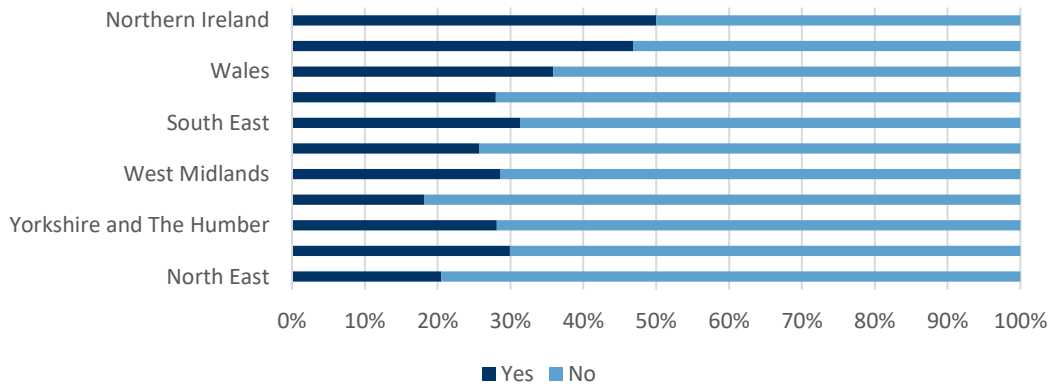
*“I live in the South West and even though dramas shoot in my region, nearly always the sound mixer is from London and sometimes Bristol. I’m constantly being told we have to hire local so now I can’t get any work any work outside the South West and I don’t get much of that. I also now get very little work in London. It’s almost impossible to work in Wales.”*

**Production sound mixer**

Across all the regions and nations, more people are out of work currently than are employed. In the South East, around a third (31%) said that they were currently working, while this figure dropped to just 18% for those in the East Midlands, 21% for those in the North East, and 28% for those in Yorkshire and Humber or the South West.

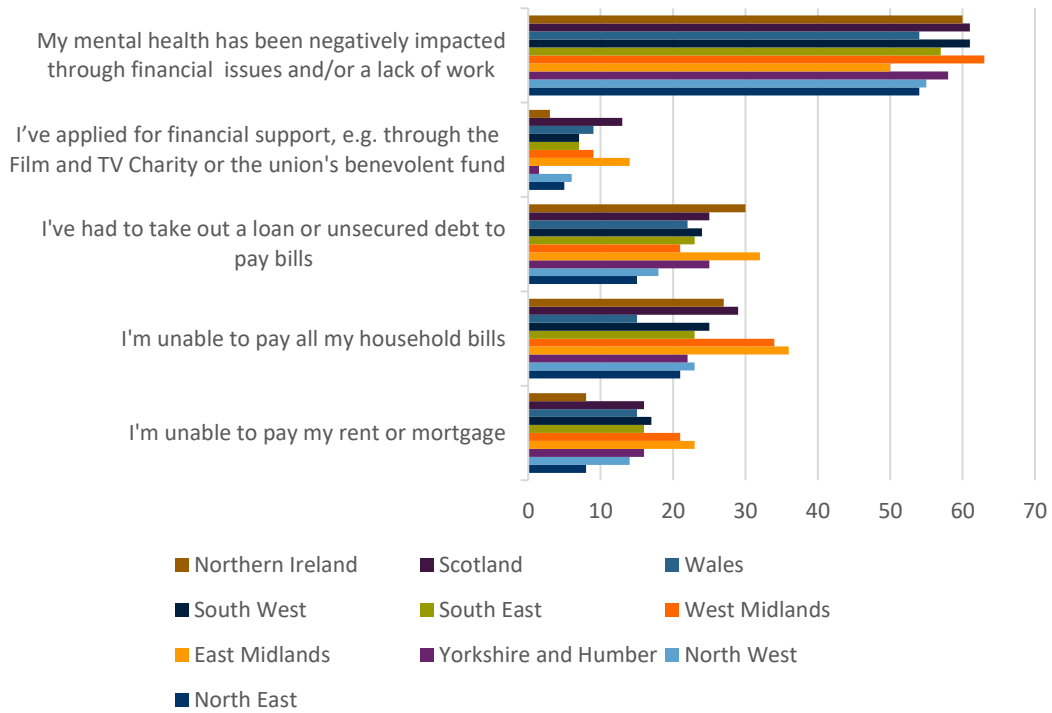
And while 29% of those in the South East have seen no work at all over the past three months, this jumps to 50% for those in the East Midlands, 46% in the North East and 37% in the South West.

### Are you currently working? By region



Despite the impact of the cost-of-living crisis across all areas of the UK, the work drought has meant that those in the East and West Midlands are among those most likely to report themselves as unable to pay their rent or mortgage, or to be unable to pay their household bills.

### Workforce impact across the regions and nations (%)



And perhaps most worrying of all is the potential for the current work drought to drain the workforce across the regions and nations, undermining any efforts to diversify the geography of production in recent years. Around half of workers in Scotland (47%), Northern Ireland (50%) and around four in ten of those in the North East (41%), North West (42%), South West (38%) and Wales (38%) say that they plan to leave the film and TV industry all together in the next five years.



## A crisis for workers

The crisis facing workers is stark. Earlier this year, the Film and TV Charity's Money Matters report laid bare the state of financial resilience for industry workers, with 42% having less than £1,000 in savings, 27% with no savings at all, and 71% expecting to not have enough work over the next six months<sup>4</sup>.

Our research highlights the dire situation freelancers have found themselves in; many respondents considered themselves "lucky" to have found work outside the industry, with others having burned through their savings, being forced to sell their homes, cars, rely on partners, friends and families, maxing out credit cards or taking on loans just to "tread water".

*"With the rise of inflation my mortgage increased by £900 per month, and with a family (and two toddlers) to support with childcare, I have been really struggling. I've had to sell my car and borrow money to survive. I have over 15 years' television directing experience, and suddenly I don't know if I have a future in this industry, it's frightening."*

**Producer/Director**

*"I have found small bouts of part time, temporary work in shops and bars to be able to pay rent and survive. I haven't been able to afford heating and have made it through winter using hot water bottles and blankets."*

**Special effects artist**

*"I had to take a part time job in hospitality to survive these dry months in film and TV. I used all my savings to pay my rent and bills. This is making me feel very unsafe about my future, thinking if I'm taking the right career, but starting from zero again scares me more."*

**Costume fitter**

*"My fridge is bare and my children don't have food. Jobs that do come to Scotland are going to folks from down South and America."*

**Key grip**

The current work drought, amidst a cost-of-living crisis and recession, is pushing the workforce to breaking point. While 8% of respondents had applied for financial support through schemes such as the Film and TV Charity, who saw a surge in applications of 800% in the summer of 2023<sup>5</sup>, respondents made it clear that these were not sufficient to provide the support they needed. Moreover, many responses showed how of those struggling, most either did not qualify for financial support or had found themselves at breaking point due to a lack of transparency from broadcasters. The quick turnaround on jobs that freelancers are used to had also meant that many were holding out for work picking up, so had not applied for financial support such as universal credit.

*"I have not had any film work since September 2023... I should have applied for universal credit but I was hopeful each month work would come in...."*

**Crowd make up daily**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/research-impact/reports/money-matters-report/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/stories-events/news/unprecedented-extra-0-5million-rolled-out-to-help-uk-film-tv-and-cinema-workers/>

*“I am extremely concerned about the younger and more junior members in our department. I have noticed that their financial struggles are quite extreme. To the point some of them cannot afford lunch or rely heavily on work-provided food in order to make up for income shortfalls. It is very disconcerting... there should be more support available directly through productions, not just charities.”*

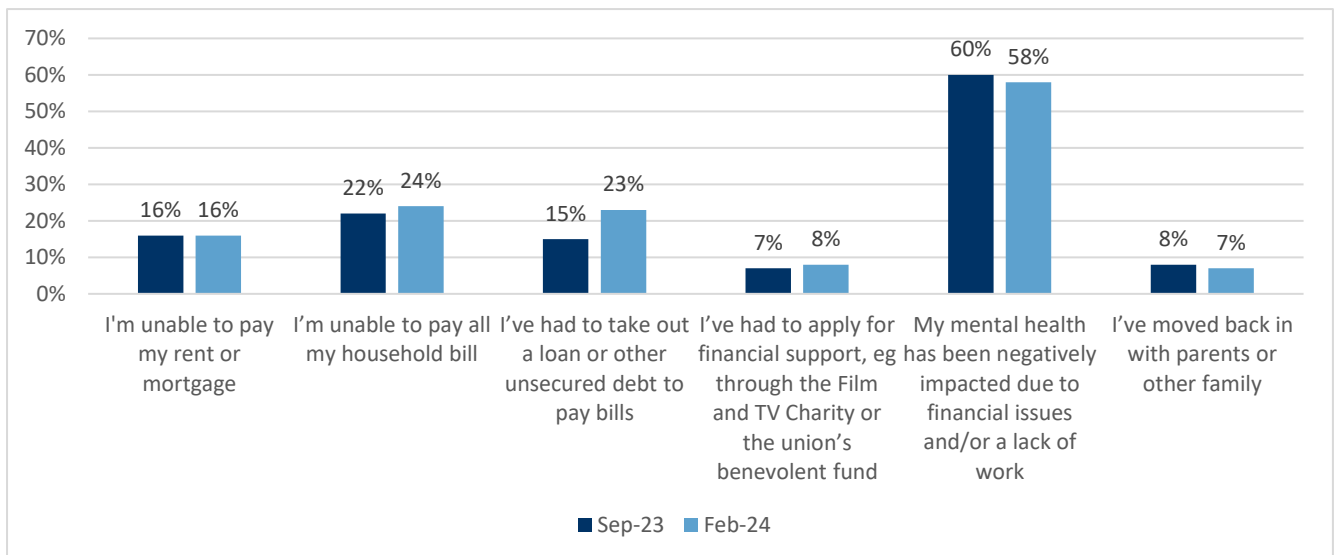
**Costume supervisor**

*“I’ve been at producer level for 20 years, always in work and I’m very good at my job. Not worked for six months – I’m desperate financially. Working class background, no family to borrow from, in social housing with two children, one of whom is disabled. I’ve taken a very low paying full time job outside the industry, have no childcare for half term next week. It’s extremely difficult.”*

**Senior edit producer**

Across our survey, 86% report finding things either extremely difficult (42%) or more difficult than normal (44%) financially given the fall in work. And very few expect things to pick up. 88% are concerned (46%) or extremely concerned (42%) about their financial security over the next six months.

Comparing our February 2024 results with our survey from September 2023, the financial impact of the crisis is now even more significant. More people said they were unable to pay all of their household bills now (24%) than in September (22%), and there has been an increase in people taking on loans or unsecured debt in order to cover their bills (23% up from 15% in September).



The drop off in work, and the subsequent financial impact, is having a significant negative impact on workers' mental health, with 75% reporting that they are struggling with their mental wellbeing. More than a quarter (26%) reported really struggling with their mental health as a result of the drop off of available work, with a number of respondents reporting having had breakdowns or becoming suicidal as a result.

*“I have had to move home. I've felt so depressed that a few months ago I attempted taking my own life due to losing where I lived, getting no work, and struggling to get 'normal' work. I'm now mentally better but I still struggle and I blame the death of the industry through 2023. Working-class people and those without connections and the disabled are hit the worst. I used to do talks to local deprived colleges to encourage kids to go into the industry. I stopped because I can no longer recommend it. It's structurally broken now. And I fear it will not return for at least five years or more.”*

**Assistant script editor**

And many respondents stressed how the shortage of work was exacerbating existing problems for workers in the industry, with rates dropping and working conditions worsening as employers take advantage of workers desperate for employment in a 'race to the bottom'.

*"The lack of work has affected my mental wellbeing and physical too. Certain production companies are taking advantage of the dire situation by cutting rates and the race to the bottom is real. Anyone from a middle-class background will survive this."*

#### **Location sound recordist**

*"I used to love working in this industry, but the way it has changed since 'streaming' has made it unsustainable. Deadlines are becoming increasingly more unrealistic, diluting the quality of the finished product. Having to work unauthorised overtime to achieve these ever-shortening deadlines is now the norm. My mental health has taken a hammering these last few years. I had a breakdown on my last job, and on the job before that, it was a common occurrence to see crew crying in the middle of the workshop or at their benches. There is NO work/life balance."*

#### **Senior prop modeller**

The mental health impact of the crisis is hitting young workers hardest; 72% of respondents aged 18-24 and 69% of those aged 25-34 say their mental health has been negatively impacted due to financial issues and/or a lack of work. 90% of 18-24s and 82% of 25-34s report struggling with their mental wellbeing.

According to the Film and TV Charity's 2022 Looking Glass report<sup>6</sup>, just 11% described the industry as a mentally healthy place to work, with 24% reporting poor mental health. But our research brings into focus just how damaging the ongoing crisis may be for the survival of a precarious workforce.

#### **Unscripted TV**

1,447 respondents

Despite US industrial action hitting film and TV drama hardest, the ripple effects of the strikes on unscripted TV in the UK have added to an existing crisis. Commissioning slowdown in unscripted TV builds on a Covid-backlog, rising production costs, reduced advertising revenue, streamer downturn and BBC licence fee freezes.

Respondents from the unscripted sector highlighted the depth of the ongoing unscripted crisis. 66% said that there has been no recovery at all since Bectu declared an emergency slowdown of work in the sector in May 2023. Just 3% say there has been a full recovery in their employment – and 16% have seen a part recovery.

*"I have worked in unscripted TV for the last 25 years and I have never known it to be so bad. I have been very successful in my career, but last year I only worked for 39 days."*

#### **Edit producer**

*"If this dry spell in unscripted TV continues I will be looking at alternative career options outside of the TV industry. A career where for 10+ years I've worked consistently and rarely suffered any long gaps suddenly looks unsustainable."*

#### **Edit producer**

*"After 25 years of employment in the unscripted TV industry, winning awards and having prime time films receive rave reviews, I have been unable to secure work or income for the last five months and there is no sign of work on the horizon as*

<sup>6</sup> <https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/assets/documents/Reports/Looking-Glass-Report-2022.pdf>

*result of the slowdown in TV commissioning.”*

**Director/producer**

*“My mental health has hit rock bottom since the unscripted crisis. I feel alone, scared and lost. I have worked in this industry for more than 20 years and I feel there is no support after everything that I have contributed with my work to the industry.”*

**Producer/director**

Across the unscripted sector, 65% of respondents say they are currently not working. This is despite 61% saying their employment was not directly impacted by the US industrial disputes and related industry slowdown. More than a quarter (27%) of unscripted workers have not had any employment at all in the past three months, while a third (32%) have worked less than four weeks over the same period.

So it is no great surprise that the vast majority (84%) are finding things financially extremely difficult (40%) or more difficult than usual (44%). And 78% are struggling with their mental wellbeing – with 60% saying their mental health has been directly negatively impacted by the slowdown in work and accompanying financial concerns. 17% of unscripted workers have been unable to pay their rent or mortgage, a quarter (24%) unable to pay their household bills, and 21% have taken out unsecured debt or loans in order to cover their bills.

Worryingly, more than half (52%) of those working in unscripted TV say they plan to leave the film and TV industry in the next five years.

## Long-term impacts for the industry

In the past few years, skills shortages have been seen as the greatest threat posed to the UK's film and TV production, as the growth of streaming services had created a 'golden era' for the industry. Just over two years ago in September 2021, the Chief Executive of the BFI, Ben Roberts, told attendees of a BFI film academy event, *“Tell your friends, we need people working and we need lots of them.”*<sup>7</sup> But any newcomers to the industry will now be facing a very uncertain future, as rather than workforce shortages, the ongoing employment drought is now posing an existential threat to the UK's screen industries.

Our research finds that a lack of work is now pushing people out of film and TV all together. There has been an increase in people planning to leave the industry within the next five years, from 24% in September 2023 to 37% in February 2024, as any anticipated industry recovery has not been realised. More than half (52%) of those working in unscripted TV say they plan to leave the film and TV industry in the next five years. This skills loss would pose a huge risk to the UK's reputation as one of the best film and TV industries globally.

Moreover, this reflects existing inequalities, as female respondents are even more likely than male respondents to not see a future in the film and TV industry – 40% of women say they see themselves in another industry in five years' time compared to 34% of men. While 37% of white respondents see themselves leaving the industry in the next five years, half of Black respondents (50%) say they will leave the film and TV industry in the next five years.

*“I'm scared. A career I've worked so hard for – over 20 years' experience. As an ethnic minority working Mum... it's all for nothing. I feel valueless and aggrieved that all those years of working crazy hours and lack of security, is for nothing. As*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.homeofproduction.com/news/tackling-the-skill-shortage>

*freelancers we're told it's part of the risk of choosing this job we're "so lucky" to have. Yet what do we freelancers have to show for it? Nothing. No pension. No career. No future. Starting from scratch in my mid 40s with a mortgage and children that depend on me. Thankless. It feels like redundancy without any severance package."*

**Edit producer**

*"We are the lifeblood of the industry, and many of us have worked our knuckles to the bone for an industry we all love, only to have it thrown back in our faces. After this slowdown there'll be no more diversity, we'll have gone back 20 years in terms of only the elite being able to afford to work in the industry."*

**Development executive**

A reduction in – already weak – industry diversity would be a huge step backwards for the industry, where Diamond data has shown those who identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic to be under-represented in all senior roles, female workers making fewer contributions off-screen than they were four years ago and the proportion of contributions made by disabled people in senior roles very low compared to population statistics<sup>8</sup>. Gritty talent founder Mel Rodrigues has referred to the ongoing TV job shortage as *"a massive own goal for the industry... unravelling all the very hard work done to create a more diverse workforce."*<sup>9</sup>

Our research makes clear that urgent action is needed to resolve the current crisis, and to address the feast and famine nature of the industry more broadly, if it is to survive at all. Broadcasters must take action to halt the exodus of diverse and talented crew and tackle the structural challenges that leave workers feeling isolated, that damage their mental health and devastate their financial security.

## Reinforcing inequalities

One of the most concerning takeaways from our research was the emphasis respondents placed on how the current crisis is amplifying existing inequalities across the industry.

*"I think the impact this current downturn will have on diversity is not being considered as a serious outcome. Being a minority in the industry is rough enough, the current climate is the nail in the coffin."*

**Unscripted producer**

*"We are suffering on projects that are even more understaffed and underfunded. We're not standing up for ourselves as much, knowing how 'lucky' we are to be in work. The industry we've worked in our entire careers will no longer be a viable option, unless you're rich/have rich parents or partners or other money behind you."*

**Casting executive**

*"Let down, ignored, used, forgotten and so many other words come to mind. A complete disregard as to how this will change the industry back in time to when it was (and kinda already was) only rich middle-aged men that got work, especially the interesting highly paid work."*

**Location assistant/researcher**

Many respondents recounted concerns that there was a doubling down of nepotistic practises, with the little work that is available going directly to a small 'inner circle' of friends.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://creativitydiversitynetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Diamond-The-6th-Cut-July2023.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [https://lnkd.in/eJbC6Rx4?trk=public\\_post-text](https://lnkd.in/eJbC6Rx4?trk=public_post-text)

*“I’ve seen so many posts from people admitting they list a job then just give the job to their friend who has also sent in a CV because they know they have kids. I actually think this is as big a problem as all the strikes – there are a small pocket of people ‘in’ the crowd going from contract to contract.”*

**Edit producer**

*“It feels like the jobs that are available, go to the same small group of men. Women on crews are suffering. Show me women on the floor without the word ‘assistant’ in their job title. This is absolutely a growing problem that seems to be being ignored.”*

**Floor manager**

We found that BAME respondents were less likely to have worked at all over the past three months than their white counterparts (29% of white respondents have not worked at all, while 38% of Asian/British Asian, 34% of those of mixed ethnic backgrounds and 32% of Black respondents say the same).

Those who could not rely financially on family were having to move more swiftly to take work outside of the industry, or to accept industry work with worse pay and conditions, with responses from single parents among those most concerned about their future.

Women were among those least likely to see a future in the film and TV industry – 40% of female respondents said they see themselves in another industry in five years’ time compared to 34% of men. And while 37% of white respondents see themselves leaving the industry in the next five years, half of Black respondents (50%) say they will the film and TV industry in the next five years.

Disabled respondents also spoke about accessibility issues and how both uncertainty and the short contract nature of work, where it could be found, made this even more difficult.

*“I’m disabled, work is being offered then the jobs are pulled and do not go into production. 18 months unemployed. If the next job I’ve been offered does finally go ahead, this may be my last in the industry”*

**Workroom supervisor**

*“Contracts are never consistent/long enough for disabled people to relocate and I really want to relocate as commuting is hard and tiring as a wheelchair user. It is still difficult for wheelchair users to be fully integrated into many broadcast workplaces when work has been available.”*

**Casting producer**

*“I am a disabled member of crew and have really struggled with the slowdown in the industry. It has forced me to look elsewhere as I feel the industry is still not accessible in any way, shape, or form.”*

**Hair and makeup artist**

Our research sets out how the current crisis, if urgent action is not taken, will turn back the clock on any industry progress on diversity and inclusion. The whole sector must think seriously about its responsibilities to the workforce and redouble efforts to find solutions.

# Supporting the workforce through, and beyond, the crisis

This report sets out a worrying picture for the screen industries in the UK, making a clear case for the need to better, and urgently, support the freelance workforce who underpin it.

It is evident that the feast and famine nature of the industry is unsustainable. We need to see a real and lasting commitment to address the structural issues that make working in the industry so precarious and lead to many people, especially those from marginalised and minoritised backgrounds, becoming disillusioned and deciding that it is no longer for them.

But there are also more immediate steps that could be taken to support workers.

## Clarity and transparency on commissioning

From our research, it is abundantly clear that workers are being left in the dark about the state of commissioning, forcing them into limbo. Workers have been reliant on their savings, for those who have them, and having no understanding of when commissioning will pick up again has made them unable to plan their finances.

We heard of workers who have not applied for support such as universal credit because they were given the impression things would pick up, only to find jobs pulled last minute and find themselves in a dire financial situation. The mental health impact on workers who don't know when or if their employment will pick up again, or what their next steps may be to keep themselves and their families afloat, is enormous.

Broadcasters have a responsibility to provide greater clarity to the workforce about the slowdown; to be transparent about changing economics in the industry and releasing data on programme commissioning.

## Funding for public sector broadcasters

The BBC's unique funding model allows it to be a truly public service broadcaster. It commissions innovative content, promotes British talent and invests in jobs across the country, contributing 5bn to the UK economy.

Threatening to scrap the licence fee model puts this contribution and jobs at risk, and the impact of the industry slowdown highlighted by our survey also shows the threat alternative funding models – such as through advertising or subscription – would pose to the BBC. Protecting funding for public sector broadcasters for the long term is critical to the survival of the workforce, and to the industry as a whole.

These threats would also extend beyond the BBC. Alternate funding models like relying on advertising revenue would be a seismic event for the market – the BBC may survive but this could prove catastrophic for other broadcasters whose business models are dependent on ad revenue.

## Ensuring a safety net for freelancers

The boom and bust nature of the industry is leaving freelancers hugely exposed and vulnerable, with no safety net, so only the wealthiest can survive. There needs to be a change to the support available for freelance workers. Universal credit is often not a viable route for freelancers as the minimum income floor rule is incompatible with the stop start nature of their work, so payments may be calculated based on a time where a worker had a decent income, but is now facing a work drought.

Across Europe, there are schemes the government could learn from to do so. In France, the 'régime des salaires intermittents du spectacle' provides an unemployment insurance

scheme for creative workers which provides benefits for periods of unemployment in the sector, providing that they have had a significant number of hours in work. The Irish Government is also currently trialling a scheme for a basic income for arts workers to recognise the financial instability faced by many working in the sector, with early evaluation showing promising results.

## **A focus on equality and diversity across the industry**

Our research outlines how a failure to provide adequate clarity and support for workers through the crisis means the industry is turning its back on equality and diversity. Workers with protected characteristics are losing out most in the current work drought, with women and BAME workers all more likely to be planning to leave the film and TV industry over the next five years.

Diverse workforces are healthy, robust, sustainable workforces, and only with true diversity across all levels can the broadcasting industry set itself up for a strong future where its people thrive and audiences receive the best content. The industry must ensure a focus on improving equality and diversity moving forward.

## **Industry collaboration critical**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the British Film Commission co-ordinated a collection of stakeholders and developed 'return-to-work' guidance to assist the industry and its workers with the ongoing recovery. The guidance, which was signed off by government, was heavily influenced by Bectu and its members, lending invaluable insights from people working in the sector. A similar approach, that places unions and their members firmly at the centre of the discussion, is needed to come to agreement across the industry about the state of play and what must be done – and by whom – to address it. Government engagement here is critical.