sign_ Screen Industries Growth Network

BREAKING THE FRAME

Diversity, Discrimination and Talent in entry-level British TV Production Trainee Schemes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report critically examines training schemes in the British television industry, with a detailed examination of one particular production trainee scheme run by a major national broadcaster, which for the purposes of anonymity we are calling the 'Screencraft Traineeship Programme' (STP). The report offers insights into the challenges faced by trainees and the complex dynamics of diversity, skills and inclusion/exclusion within the industry. Drawing on qualitative analysis and informed by critical theory, the research investigates the complex issues surrounding entry-level schemes and their impact on aspiring professionals from diverse backgrounds.

The report underscores the pivotal role of the STP as a paid and secure 12-month scheme, providing an important entry route into an industry that is notoriously difficult to access for individuals from working-class backgrounds, who often lack the financial resources to pursue unpaid or unstable employment opportunities (Brook et al, 2020). It also examines the intersectional challenges for trainees caused by gender, race, neurodiversity and mental health issues. It sheds light on the struggles faced by trainees, including the process of abrupt relocations and the profound emotional and financial challenges associated with uprooting their lives. The research also emphasises the crucial need for tailored support, especially for trainees dealing with mental health issues, stressing the importance of addressing these unique needs within the framework of training programs.

This report also interrogates the concept of 'talent' and the expectation of 'passion' and 'gratitude' within the industry's selection and production processes. It reveals the dominance of cultural capital, social networks and industry norms, which shape opportunities and reinforce existing inequalities. The report highlights the difficulties faced by trainees who do not conform to the industry's typical worker profile, particularly women, racialised groups, and individuals with disabilities. These aspiring professionals often find themselves on the margins of an industry characterised by a lack of diversity and representation, leading to feelings of alienation and exclusion.

Additionally, the report explores instances of racial discrimination and isolation within workplaces, underlining the need for genuine inclusivity beyond tokenistic efforts. It emphasises the potential power of mentorship programs, which can counterbalance discrimination by providing marginalised workers with guidance, advice, and connections within the industry. The report also advocates for the creation of safe spaces within production companies, encouraging open dialogue to foster a profound understanding of diverse perspectives.

Furthermore, the report delves into the challenges faced by trainees during their transition from the STP to their careers in the industry. It explores the long-term impact of the scheme and

the support provided by the training provider, highlighting the significance, for some, of sustained relationships and mentorship beyond the program's duration.

In conclusion, the report advocates for a radical transformation of the industry's culture, urging active measures to dismantle barriers and create pathways for diverse talents to flourish. By acknowledging and addressing the systemic issues perpetuating inequality, the television industry can move towards a more inclusive environment where all aspiring professionals, regardless of their background, can thrive. Training and entry-level programmes are an important part of this.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CONVERGENCE OF A SKILLS AND DIVERSITY CRISIS IN THE SCREEN INDUSTRIES

'[D]espite all those mentoring and training programmes, despite these easy to roll-out solutions, the fact is the situation has deteriorated, badly' (Lenny Henry's Bafta speech 2014, cited in Boyle, 2018)

The screen industries in the UK are currently mired in a profound diversity, inclusivity and skills crisis. These issues are inter-related and the many barriers to entering the industry are structural and intersectional (BFI, 2022; CAMEo, 2018). Historically, the screen industries have been criticised for a lack of diversity leading to a lack of wider perspectives and talents (Ofcom, 2021). This underrepresentation not only hampers the industry's creative potential but is a situation of significant ethical and, moral concern (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Banks, 2017). Research has consistently highlighted the underrepresentation of various demographic groups, including women, people of colour, and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, in both on-screen and off-screen roles (Ofcom, 2021; O'Connor and Flintham, 2023; Brook et al, 2018). It is now widely recognised that the television and screen industries face deep-seated and ongoing challenges related to inclusivity and diversity. The Creative Diversity Network (CDN) reported in 2021 that ethnic minority representation in senior television roles remained stagnant at 9%, while disabled workers stayed below 5%

for five years (CDN, 2021). Maternal careers are jeopardized by childcare needs (Wreyford et al., 2021). Exploitative, unsafe, and bullying-prone conditions persist in the creative sector, as indicated by ongoing research and advocacy. Over the years, the industry has made notable attempts to address its issues. Numerous diversity and inclusion initiatives (Bhavnani, 2007; CAMEo, 2018) emerged following broader social movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. Yet, many of these efforts in the screen sector have fallen short of tackling systemic racism, sexism, ableism, and class discrimination, prompting critical scrutiny of their shortcomings (Malik & Nwonka, 2021; Newsinger & Eikhof, 2020).

Statistical research confirms qualitative findings, revealing the industry's dominance by middle and upper-class individuals and the obstacles faced by working class entrants (Brook et al, 2020). The failure to address structural and economic factors both within and beyond the industry hampers meaningful change (Newsinger & Eikhof, 2020). This is particularly important due to pervasive discrimination based on race, class, disability, and gender

(Brook et al., 2020; Eikhof et al., 2019; Liddy & O'Brien, 2021; Malik & Nwonka, 2021; O'Brien, 2014, 2015, 2019; Saha, 2012, 2018; Van Raalte, 2021). Paradoxically, despite the proliferation of equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) initiatives, these efforts often remain superficial, providing only the illusion of progress (Nwonka, 2020). Modes of entry to the industry are opaque and are often connected to modes of middle and upper-class social and cultural capital – about 'who you know' rather than 'what you know' (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Grigulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Lee, 2011). This means that inclusion in the screen industry is hampered by the centrality of certain forms of elite social capitals and network labour markets in securing work. Professionals often rely on informal networks and personal connections to secure opportunities, leaving those without such access at a disadvantage (McRobbie, 2018). This reliance on social capital not only perpetuates existing inequalities but also fosters an environment where meritocracy struggles to prevail, hindering the industry's ability to harness diverse skills and perspectives (Saha, 2018).

As well as being an issue deserving moral attention (what Banks has called the need for 'creative justice' (2017) in relation to the significant ethical issues of access, fairness, diversity and inclusion that plague the creative industries), it is also a factor that is impacting skill development (O'Connor and Flintham, 2023). This skills crisis is therefore connected to the deep and structurally embedded diversity crisis in the television industry. Within the screen industries, which heavily rely on nuanced and tacit knowledge, the challenge of training and skills development is particularly urgent. This challenge is particularly apparent in the television and screen industries,

where the convergence of technological advancements and evolving audience demands requires a highly skilled and adaptable workforce (Screen Skills, 2022; BFI, 2022; Jones et al, 2022). The skills crisis in the television and screen industries manifests in several interconnected ways. Firstly, the rapid evolution of technology necessitates continuous upskilling to keep pace with emerging trends and tools (BFI, 2022). Secondly, the demand for diverse skills (and multi-skilling), from scriptwriting to digital editing, imposes a strain on the industry in the context of a wider skills shortage (Jones et al, 2022). Furthermore, the industry's intricate web of roles, from directors to sound engineers, requires not only individual expertise but also effective collaboration and interdisciplinary skills.

The dearth of diversity not only limits the industry's creative spectrum but also exacerbates the existing skills gap by side-lining a pool of untapped talent. The prevalence of precarity in television employment compounds the challenges. Many professionals, including writers, directors, and technicians, take up risky and strenuous self-employed working conditions including insecure short-term contracts, long and intense working hours, and the demand to be geographically mobile, (Paterson, 2001; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Lee, 2018). This precariousness stifles long-term skill development, making it challenging for individuals to invest in continuous education and training.

Entry-level training programmes in the Screen Industries

In response to the diversity and skills challenges in the screen industries

sector, an array of training initiatives have emerged to bridge the skills gap and enhance inclusivity within the British television and screen industries. These initiatives, including entry-level schemes such as the Screencraft Traineeship Programme (STP) , claim to play a pivotal role in nurturing talent, fostering diversity, and addressing the industry's skill requirements.[1] However, the policy and discursive shift towards 'diversity' in the sector can reproduce many of the inequalities that it seeks to address, as scholars of race and cultural production have argued (Saha, 2018; Nwonka, 2020). Most schemes had a focus (implicit or explicit) on diversity, reflecting a tendency in the sector to see recruitment as a straightforward solution to the diversity 'problem' (Nwonka and Malik 2021). Scholars have highlighted the ways in which a focus on recruitment frames diversity as the result of a skills 'deficit' on the part of 'diverse' entrants while doing nothing to address the systemic barriers to entry and progression (Newsinger and Eikhof 2020; Saha 2018). While there are claims that such schemes can be successful at the level for specific individuals (CAMEo 2018) there is scant evidence of impact at the level of the industry; indeed, it has been suggested that such schemes exacerbate inequality (Nwonka 2020). Therefore, understanding the efficacy of such initiatives is essential for crafting targeted solutions to the skills crisis and promoting a diverse and inclusive sector.

To provide some insights into the skills and labour market challenges outlined above, and using a case study approach, this report focuses on the phenomenon of the entry level training

scheme in film and television, with a view to determining what works – and what does not work – for different groups of trainees given their different circumstances and needs. It responds to industry calls for more effective evaluation of training provision and a better understanding of whether and how such schemes provide routes into work in the screen industries for so-called 'under-represented' groups.

We position the project in relation to recent studies of creative justice (Banks 2017) in that we are concerned with the question of who gets to work in film and television and the role that entry level schemes may (or may not) play in supporting individuals to pursue a career that they value. Concepts of talent which are so prevalent in the industry are foregrounded by entry-level schemes (Boyle, 2018). However, the concept of 'talent' is socially constructed and infused with problematic discursive echoes of meritocracy – the idea that anyone can make it regardless of their circumstances if they have the right attributes and if they work hard enough. Extensive research on social inequality and the 'myth of meritocracy' proves this to be a fallacy – opportunity and success is deeply connected to one's social status, and to structural social factors such as race, gender and class (Littler, 2017). Therefore, this research critically interrogates the ways in which notions of 'talent' serve to mask inequalities and/or to challenge dominant assumptions about what talent is and who has it.

The research was designed around two key areas of work:

1. Mapping entry-level schemes in the UK television industry,

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1. For the sake of maintaining the anonymity of our research participants, we have not included the specific details of the STP. It is a scheme run by a British broadcaster, and shares commonalities with other such schemes.

determining similarities and differences.

This initial stage of research was undertaken in order to determine similarities and differences between the schemes, and to provide a context for the qualitative research. The mapping was focused on identifying particular issues and developing critical insights into such schemes, drawing on industry literature and reports, academic research and 'grey' literature from policy organisations.

2. Undertaking a focused qualitative investigation of one specific Production Traineeship Scheme, commissioned by a major national broadcaster.

A series of interviews was carried out to provide insights into the lived experiences of trainees (past and present) who were either on the STP scheme or had been through it, and to gather the perspectives of workers at production companies that hosted the trainees. The intention of this case study research was to identify, through longitudinal analysis, the opportunities and affordances offered by the scheme, and also the limitations and challenges of the STP as an intervention.

Case Study: The Screencraft Traineeship Programme

The key focus of this report is on the qualitative research that we carried out on a national broadcaster's training scheme as an example of a long-running entry level scheme. To retain anonymity, we are calling this scheme the Screencraft Traineeship

Programme. The STP is run by a major broadcaster and is long established. It is outsourced to, and delivered by a training consultancy and takes on around 12-14 trainees each year in a highly competitive process, based on stringent criteria that seek to assess candidates' potential and dedication to the industry, and embeds them within a production company for one year on a salary provided by the broadcaster. It is a prestigious scheme, and well known within the industry. Past trainees have gone on to significant success in the industry – including roles such as network channel commissioners, executive producers and company directors.[2] Trainees get to work across factual productions at some of the top independent production companies in the UK, in locations across the country. This study delves into the specifics of this scheme, focusing on how trainees and relevant workers experienced the selection process, the scheme itself, and the subsequent career development outcomes.

The scheme has had many successes, such as bringing people into the industry who would not have been able to undertake unpaid internships or precarious entry-level work. However, we argue that, by focussing on diversity at the entry point alone, it serves some disadvantaged groups far better than others. The recruitment support, training and funding offered can open doors for some trainees, but the limited support offered beyond the end of the scheme means that trainees who require additional scaffolding or adjustments in work in the long term are set up to fail by a sector which is often ill-equipped for flexibility. We conclude this report with recommendations for improvements

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2.   To retain the scheme's anonymity we are not able to provide specific details here, but we were provided with evidence of this from the broadcaster and from our own research including on platforms such as LinkedIn.

which could extend the diversity of participants and support more young people to engage successfully with the scheme and to take up a career in television beyond the programme.

In the scheme, trainees are embedded within production companies around the UK on a paid, secure contract for one year. The sustained nature of the role, and inclusion of on-the-job learning offers a good opportunity for hands-on experience and skill development. However, examining reflections of both current trainees on the programme as it happened and past trainees looking back on the scheme and the role it had in their subsequent career provides insights into the scheme's educational efficacy and its success at enabling them to take up work in the screen industries.

Characteristics of the STP

The 'Screencraft Traineeship Programme', offered by a prominent national broadcaster in collaboration with an industry-focused registered company that specialises in training, represents a pioneering initiative aimed at individuals facing barriers to entry in the television industry. This programme spans diverse locations across the UK, offering selected participants a 12-month work and training experience within independent production companies. The fundamental goal of the STP is to 'dismantle barriers hindering the entry of aspiring professionals into the television industry'.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants for the STP possess either a degree or demonstrate prior exposure to the television industry through roles such as runners, work experience, or short-term placements. Importantly, applicants should not have accumulated more than three months of industry experience, aligning with the scheme's objective of offering entry-level opportunities.

The scheme aims to provide opportunities for individuals currently underrepresented in the TV industry. The organisers express a particular interest in hearing from disabled individuals, people from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as individuals from lower socio-economic groups who reside in or are currently employed in regional cities and locations around the UK.

Programme Structure:

Introduction Week: The scheme commences with an intensive week-long training program, where current trainees meet scheme alumni and gain insights from experienced Commissioning Editors and other professionals. This foundational week equips participants with invaluable perspectives and a sense of what to expect from the STP, laying the groundwork for the rest of the scheme.

Placement with Production Companies: Following the introductory week, trainees embark on immersive placements within independent production companies. Under the mentorship of industry professionals, participants work across television production, acquiring hands-on experience and practical knowledge crucial for their career development.

Continuous Training and Support: Throughout the 12-month duration, trainees receive sustained training and support, intended to foster their skills and enhance their understanding of the industry. Monthly sessions, facilitated by experts, focus on skill refinement, knowledge enrichment, and professional growth, which aim to ensure that participants are well-prepared to navigate the complexities

of the television landscape.

Research Questions

The study critically engages with the STP, to consider how far it supports increased diversity and inclusion. Through this case study, it considers wider issues around entry level training schemes in the screen industries.

The project therefore focused on the following research questions:

RQ 1. How do entry level schemes articulate the challenges of entry to the film and television industries, linking the 'problem' of skills to that of diversity?

In addressing this question, we draw on interviews with a range of skill providers and our research in relation to the STP. We will also draw on analysis of available documents relating to the various schemes. This analysis revealed how the schemes articulated and tried to address barriers to entry, the 'skills' required by entrants to the sector and how the concept of talent was deployed in the design of the schemes.

RQ 2. How are the schemes experienced by trainees?

Here we drew on our interviews with current STP trainees and previous trainees. This strand of research helped us address questions about differences in on-the-job learning opportunities and the ways in which access to skill development in the workplace might be shaped by workplace culture (something that we found in our initial research with STP trainees), the ways in which differences in trainees' contexts shaped their experience, the extent to which trainees experienced stigma and discrimination in the workplace and the ways in which they navigated and resisted institutional discrimination and

barriers to progression. We were keen to understand trainees' ambitions in relation to the scheme, the skills that they wanted to develop and the extent to which they did so.

Our research in this area remains ongoing, and we hope to examine the long-term impacts of entry-level schemes like the STP in the future. We have become aware of the importance of the training provider in supporting trainees many years post-traineeship. We are also keen to see whether STP participants are better able to avoid known career challenges for 'diverse' workers such as ghettoization (Saha 2018). The research to date has enabled us to identify some longer term impacts for past trainees but we have not been able to fully address these for the current cohort. We hope to be able to continue to track the trainees' progress through the industry in the coming years.

Methods

To begin the research, we carried out a mapping of entry level schemes in the UK screen industries. This mapping was carried out using document analysis and online research, combined with interviews with key stakeholders across the screen industries.

The qualitative research on the STP underpins the core of the report. This was divided into two components: (i) A study with current unscripted STP trainees from the 2022-23 cohort that aimed to uncover the experience and impact of the scheme in terms of trainees' career ambitions and (ii) a study with former trainees that sought to determine the longer-term impact of the scheme for different trainees. This report synthesises the two data sets to provide rich insights into the short and long term affordances of participation

in the scheme.

While we had sought to engage with the entire 22/23 cohort (14 trainees) only six elected to take part in the study. While this is a smaller group of trainees, it has been valuable to track the trainees' experiences in 'real time', as we sought to interview as many as possible at more than one point in the scheme. TV production can be a difficult sector in terms of research access. The fragmented and competitive nature of employment means that most companies are inundated with applications from hopefuls seeking internships, placements and various forms of access. Researchers' requests are often lost in this welter of correspondence. In this case access, which had already been agreed by the broadcaster, was hindered by the rapid turnover of staff there and the fact that delivery of the scheme had been almost entirely devolved to the consultancy company delivering it, which was extremely reluctant to admit academic researchers. We put a considerable amount of effort into negotiating access, but many of the barriers were stubborn. However, to add to this data, we also included both past trainees, who could speak of their experiences in the light of their subsequent careers, and the partner-production companies that hosted trainees. Including these perspectives added considerably to the depth and rigour of the study.

The interviews were carried out by the project team between 2022 and 2023. In terms of the trainees that we spoke to who were going through the scheme during the research period, where possible an initial interview was carried out, followed by 1-2 follow-up interviews, according to their availability. Past trainees and placement providers were interviewed once. All interviews took

30-90 minutes. We completed seven interviews with former STP trainees. It was more difficult to track down ex-trainees than anticipated, but we were able to connect with trainees across different cohorts and with a range of experiences post-traineeship. Such difficulties in undertaking media production research are well documented and include concerns about reputation management, gatekeeping and institutional resistance to external examination (Paterson et al, 2016). We spoke to five workers in companies who had, at some point, hosted STP trainees, for their perspective on the scheme. We also visited one of the partner companies and met with trainees and workers on-site.

The mapping work sought to understand the STP within the wider context of entry-level schemes in the industry. In-depth interviews with current and former STP trainees provided qualitative and, where possible, longitudinal insights into their experiences, challenges faced, and aspirations, while interviews with wider stakeholders to the STP (including the broadcaster and host companies) aimed to understand how the scheme worked, including macro-level industry dynamics and micro-level individual experiences. The interviews with past trainees augmented insights from the current cohort, allowing people to reflect on the role of the scheme in their professional lives, over time. Details of the interview schedule can be found in the appendix.

Methodologically, our approach was also informed by recent work taking up Sen's concept of capabilities (Garnham 1997; Hesmondhalgh 2017; Moss 2018; Banks 2017; Robeyns 2017) as a way of exploring equity and well-being. This approach foregrounds the voices and of trainees and draws attention

to the different contexts that shape trainees' experiences. A capabilities lens acknowledges that different individuals have different needs and opportunities with respect to the film and television labour market, and that the same scheme will be experienced differently by individuals.

2. MAPPING 'ENTRY LEVEL' SCHEMES

The initial stage of the work involved carrying out a comprehensive mapping of key 'entry-level' schemes across the sector. We defined entry-level schemes as sustained, on the job learning programmes (involving work experience alongside formal training and support e.g. mentoring) that aimed to support individuals to begin a career in film and TV[3].

We recorded the following details:

- **Scheme details: scheme focus, aims, selection processes, participant numbers, location, organisations involved and sources of funding, duration, post-scheme assistance, scheme history and development (it seems likely that many schemes are offered as one-off initiatives)**

- **We also considered the underlying purpose of the scheme, the nature of the intervention it offered, and the discursive values that it embodied.**

Figure 1 visualises this data and clearly shows that the largest category are broadcaster schemes (7, followed by training provider and charity schemes (3 each).

The graph below compares the different lengths of the entry-level schemes that we identified through the desk research.

In terms of what the schemes are offering and the skills that they think they are developing the table below provides a summary.
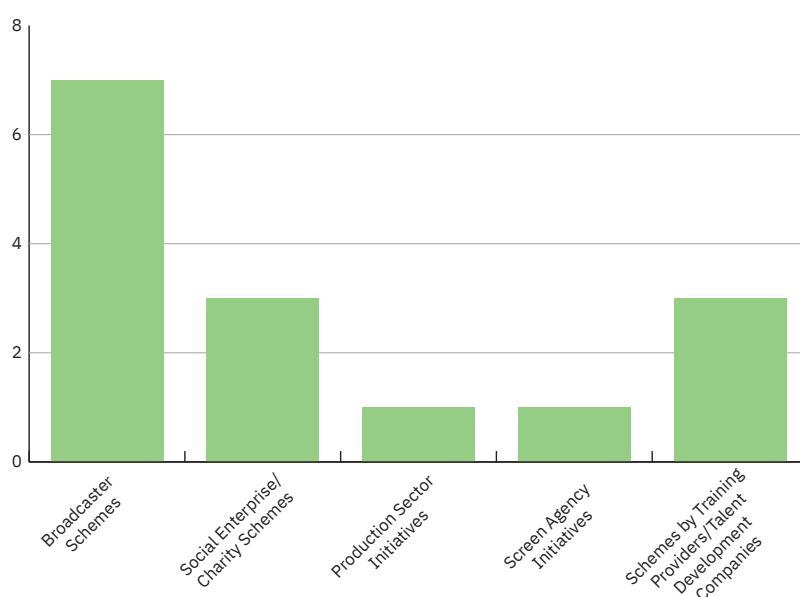
Figure 1: Different types of schemes

3. We have not included internships in our analysis of schemes. Internships are highly varied, but typically offer on the job learning only i.e no training element.

BREAKING THE FRAME TV Production Trainee Schemes

| Type of scheme	Name of scheme	Length of Scheme
Broadcaster schemes	BBC Production Apprenticeship fast-track/ Production Advanced Traineeship Scheme/Technical Operator apprenticeship	18 months
	Channel 4 Production Traineeship Scheme / apprenticeships	12 months
	ITV Studios Production Traineeship Scheme/ Development Trainees	12 months
	ITV Content Editor apprenticeship	12 months
	Sky Ignite scheme	12 months
	Bisha K. Ali Screenwriting Talent Programme	12 months
	Netflix Grow Creative UK	N/a
	Apple Creative Studios	4 weeks
Social enterprise/ charity schemes	MAMA Youth TV Production Training	8 weeks
	Grierson Trust Core Programme/In Focus Editing and In Focus Production Management schemes offered in conjunction with Netflix	12 months
	Creative Access schemes offered in conjunction with broadcasters e.g. Sky Creative access scheme	12-18 months
Production sector initiatives	PACT Indie Diversity Scheme (with Screenskills)	6 months
Screen Agency Initiatives	Beyond Brontes Screen Yorkshire	4 months including a 4 week placement
	BFI Film Academy Short Courses for 16-19 year olds	1-2 weeks
	Film London Breaking The Glass Ceiling	6 months
Schemes offered by training providers/ talent development companies	Screenskills Film and TV Apprenticeships /	13-20 months
	Screenskills Broadcast Production Assistant/ Production Co-ordinator	13-15 months
	NFTS/Prime Video traineeship	12-15 months
	NextGen Junior Animation Apprenticeship	18 months

Table 1: Entry-level schemes in the UK screen industries
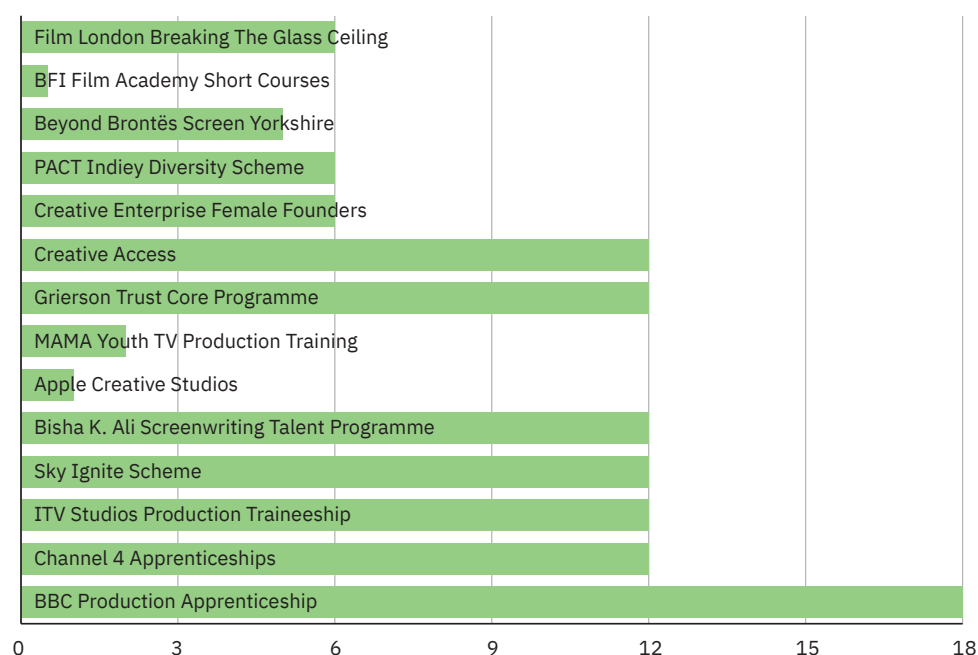
Figure 2: Comparison of Entry-Level Scheme Lengths

https://screen-network.org.uk

Identifying commonalities and differences in the entry level training schemes landscape

As our mapping activity suggests, recruitment focused initiatives are widespread, and have now become a significant feature of the professional landscape in the UK's film and television sector. Some schemes were very short term (4 weeks) offering a level of job insecurity which may limit the sorts of applicants able to take up the roles (see figure 2). While some schemes are immersive (e.g. many of the broadcaster schemes are like this), some offer workshops that are attended alongside the trainee's day job.

Our mapping of key entry-level schemes in the UK's screen industries highlighted several key patterns and themes:

1. Variety and brevity of schemes:

The mapping reveals a diverse range of entry-level schemes, spanning from broadcaster initiatives to social enterprise/charity schemes, production sector initiatives, and schemes offered by training providers. Notably, some schemes are short-lived (figure 2), creating an insecure offer which may limit the diversity of applicants.

2. Focus on diversity:

A predominant theme across these schemes is the emphasis on diversity, whether implicit or explicit. All initiatives have a focus on recruiting individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, reflecting the sector's recognition of diversity issues. Such initiatives tend to frame diversity challenges as skill deficits among diverse entrants rather than addressing the systemic barriers present in the

industry (Nwonka, 2020). This approach will not lead to significant industry-wide change and might even exacerbate inequality.

3. Performative vs. Substantive Impact:

There is a related concern that some schemes are performative, giving the impression that inequalities in the sector have been addressed, which may actually conceal the wider and more substantial changes still necessary to make the industry fairer and more inclusive. While there are often claims of individual successes resulting from these schemes, the overall impact of entry-level TV traineeships on the industry remains unclear. The limited evidence available raises questions about the effectiveness of these initiatives in creating systemic change and reducing inequality.

Need for further research

The mapping exercise underscores the necessity for in-depth research and evaluation of traineeship schemes in the British TV and film industries. The overarching question revolves around whether these entry-level schemes truly enhance creative justice. The focus on the entry level seems to rely on the idea that the diversity issue in the UK's screen sector is only about recruitment, reinforcing an underlying assumption that the industry is fundamentally meritocratic, without any further barriers to 'diverse' workers thriving. Creative justice, in this context, refers to providing equal opportunities and addressing the barriers faced by individuals from diverse backgrounds in the creative industries. To achieve creative justice, there is a need to move beyond performative diversity initiatives and focus on addressing systemic issues, providing long-term support,

and fostering a more inclusive industry culture.

While the mapping exercise highlights the presence of numerous entry-level schemes in the UK's screen industries, the effectiveness of these initiatives in promoting diversity, addressing inequalities, and enhancing creative justice remains a critical area for further research and evaluation. A detailed and critical understanding of the challenges faced by entrants and the impact of these schemes is essential for devising more effective and sustainable strategies for fostering diversity and inclusion within the industry. The mapping research here provided insights into general conditions and implicit values of such entry level schemes, forming the basis for a critical examination of our case study. With this in mind, we will now turn to the individual experiences of trainees and training providers involved in the STP.

3. THE SCREENCRAFT TRAINEESHIP PROGRAMME: CASE STUDY FINDINGS

The rest of this report focuses on the thematic findings from the qualitative interviews with trainees, past trainees and other key stakeholders involved in the STP. In this work we are influenced by the extensive and growing body of critical work from media industries, cultural policy and media studies which provides an important foundation for this research, and our results suggest some ways in which entry schemes might reproduce as well as challenge inequality. While a body of recent research into questions of diversity have focused on quantitative measures (drawn from demographic datasets such as the ONS) and policy analysis (e.g. Brook et al, 2017), this project takes a more micro-level qualitative approach to reveal both the ways in which entry level schemes 'induct' diverse entrants into the industry (with implications for professional identities, and skill development) and the ways in which individuals and groups navigate this process of induction.

Unequal barriers to entry, 'ideal' workers and mobility

The provision of a paid and secure 12-month scheme was a significant enabling factor for many trainees that we interviewed, particularly those from working-class backgrounds and those without financial support from their families. Studies have shown that financial insecurity can act as a barrier to entry for marginalised groups in the workforce (e.g. Meltzer et al, 2010). The relative job security offered by the scheme (compared to many other programmes – see mapping exercise) was identified by some of the trainees

and ex-trainees we interviewed as enabling. Many participants could not have taken up a significant period of unpaid or unstable employment:

[W]hat attracted me to this one [the STP] was ... it was a year-long contract. And for me, I couldn't really afford to just do two months or three months here or there, which I did see some other kind of traineeships.

However, some trainees found the transition into the scheme challenging. Some reported that the quick recruitment process involved relocation within a period of just a few weeks, presenting a significant practical and emotional hurdle them, before the programme itself had even begun. The

sudden upheaval involved in relocating - particularly the stress and financial risks associated with ending a tenancy (e.g. Somerville, 1998), leaving paid employment, and being geographically separated from family and friends – was particularly disruptive for people with mental health issues, those with limited financial resources, and those not able to rely on family support. Existing research shows that individuals with mental health conditions are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of disruptions to their daily routine (e.g. McManus et al, 2009) and that financial strain can exacerbate mental health issues (e.g. Cuipers et al, 2008), backing up our findings in this area. One participant reflected about the challenges involved in being offered a place on the scheme, which required relocation:

They put me in an untenable situation, that they both offered me the job of my dreams, but also kind of just out of reach with my abilities. Before we even got to talking about job specifics, just the journey alone would have been something in itself.

In this and other ways, the research made it clear that the industry – and the STP scheme – has an 'ideal type' of entry level worker in mind: highly mobile, with the ability to uproot oneself, and one without existing carer responsibilities, which are practically impossible due to the punishing workloads and long -hours culture within television production. Trainees with mental health issues emphasized their need for more support in the scheme, underscoring the importance of tailored support and workplace flexibility. One trainee told us:

I don't think my needs were particularly met. Like maybe I needed a bit more support in terms of well-being, then maybe the next person, because I don't have that sort of family to talk to or

anything like that.

Some criticised the scheme for its lack of genuine diversity and suggested that the inclusion of diverse candidates might be more of a checkbox exercise for the companies, rather than a sincere effort to promote inclusivity.

It feels like a façade. You know what I mean? Like, again, it's like it looks great. It sounds great. We're getting diverse people into the company. But we're still not being hired for things.

Some trainees advocated for greater representation of individuals from diverse backgrounds in the television industry, and were cynical about the how far the scheme would enable them to take up and sustain a career in the sector:

I wanna see more people in TV from a background like mine...it's not fair that we can't get into television or any sort of big career just because we grew up in an unstable home.

This account suggests the ways in which the scheme was experienced differently in practice, according to trainees' backgrounds and needs. The notion of talent also had a role to play in this regard.

Interrogating 'talent'

Concepts of 'talent' play a key role in determining who is selected for opportunities in the cultural industries and is therefore key to conversations around distributive justice (Banks, 2017). Interrogating 'talent' in the sector highlights, among other things, the dominance of middle-class norms and differing opportunities to foster creative skills and the ability to speak with authority about media content (Oakley and O'Brien, 2015). On one hand, entry level schemes like the STP seem to be moving away from the

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more obvious proxies for economic and social capital such as educational attainment and media production experience (there is no requirement to have completed formal education). On the other hand, looking at elements of the selection process we see evidence of the ongoing significance of forms of cultural capital such as the ability to speak confidently about television content (including using industry terminology such as 'format') and to demonstrate a strong understanding of the sector. Job descriptions call for excellent communication, teamwork and organisational skills, attention to detail, IT proficiency, and in one case an understanding of the research process.

 The concept of 'passion' plays a key role in the selection process (it is the first criteria on all job descriptions), potentially serving as a proxy for talent in an entry-level context. It is largely operationalised in terms of an ability to speak knowledgably about television content. That 'passion' is an explicit criteria may be problematic because has a role in the reproduction of exploitative conditions. As cultural work researchers have explored, affective dispositions (and expectations of such dispositions) creates a context where exploitative and unequal working conditions are 'unspeakable' (Lee, 2019), where to even think critically about labour conditions is internally perceived as a form of 'failure', allowing for a disavowal of injustice. In such ways, as researchers have explored, the psychic life of neoliberalism is maintained and reproduced (Scharff, 2016).

Our evidence indicates that success within the scheme favours those who are able to draw on significant cultural capital and who are able to adapt easily to the demands of the existing production cultures. These trainees

often visibly embody the sector's ambitions with respect to inclusion and 'diversity' but do so largely without challenging the status quo, in terms of requiring significant adjustments in the workplace. While the producers interviewed to date have praised the scheme for selecting brilliant young people, 'really talented interesting people from different backgrounds' (and very much prized the selection process as a key value that the scheme delivers to independent producers) one independent producer reflected on the challenge of the selection process:

The people that tend to make it [onto the STP] are very driven and you do wonder whether they would succeed anyway. I do think that it still possibly works against people from a deprived background if I'm honest.

Another pointed out that the scheme had been advertised primarily through the broadcaster's own Twitter feed, a source unlikely to be accessed by young people not already reasonably actively engaged with the sector would have been able to access.

They're missing a trick with that, because it does feel like, you're getting people who already have a foot in the door. This is why they're looking at the [broadcaster] website, you see what I'm saying?

The significance of cultural capital in the television industry has far-reaching implications, especially for individuals from diverse backgrounds. In many cases, those who did not hail from middle-class social environments found it difficult to 'fit in' during the traineeship. This emerged from data with interviews with trainees with mental health needs and disabilities, as well as for some of those from working class backgrounds. Racialised trainees also described everyday experiences of racism which marked them out as different from their colleagues. Feeling

like an outsider in the workplace was a difficult experience and constrained trainees' progression:

I stick out like a sore thumb. I haven't been able to blend in, make a single friend. I often have lunch by myself.

I thought I was gonna be a bit more…I thought I was gonna be a bit more happier here because I'd left everything I knew. So friends were a massive part of my life and, so all my friends are still up in [city] and I moved for this job and I was like, well, you know, 'I'm gonna make friends here. It'll be really, really amazing'. And I put a lot of pressure, I guess on work to find friends and there's nobody here that wants to be my friend, which I'm really really struggling with.

These words echo the sentiments of others, who grappled with a profound sense of being out of place; of not belonging. This feeling of alienation, particularly in the context of the television industry, is a topic that has been extensively explored in a recent publication by Lenny Henry and Marcus Ryder (2021). Their book delves into the intricate layers of diversity and creative work within the industry, highlighting the profound sense of 'difference' experienced by individuals in a landscape dominated by a lack of diversity.

Yet, despite these experiences of discrimination and barriers to feeling included, our trainees also found it very difficult to explicitly challenge their situation, due to a sense that they were incredibly lucky to have this opportunity, which they often described as a 'golden ticket' into a highly desirable and competitive industry. This connects with Aust's (2022) conception of the role of gratitude as a powerful norm and cultural expectation within the television industry. She argues that an internalised sense of gratitude (for being given the opportunity to work in a highly selective creative industry)

functions as a powerful mode of affective regulation in the industry, inhibiting television workers from challenging the pervasive exploitative conditions. Affective forces such as gratitude and 'passion' are mobilised within the industry to continually produce a supply of new workers willing to tolerate current conditions, curtailing the possibility of progressive change. Yet, it can be seen that in the accounts of our participants, there lies a powerful call for change — a call to dismantle the barriers of cultural capital that isolate and exclude certain sorts of people from the sector. Their stories reflect a systemic issue that demands urgent attention. As we delved deeper, it became evident that addressing the systemic barriers to workers with specific needs was not just a matter of equity but an essential step toward fostering a truly inclusive and representative television industry. By acknowledging and understanding the narratives of trainees, we can work toward dismantling the walls of exclusion and creating pathways for diverse voices to be heard and celebrated within television.

Inclusion/exclusion

I think when I started, I was the only black woman in the office, which I was just, like, weird.

One of the experiences I had there was only one other Black guy in the in the office and the amount of times it was like people mix our names up and it was kind of like, 'but this guy's been here for like 3 years before I got here. And we look nothing alike'. We also learnt quickly that it was like as much as the industry kind of wants diversity or it's like, yeah, these schemes are great…perhaps we were naive in that sense of yeah, the great we're on it, but it's like none of the industries not gonna have like completely

changed overnight. It's, it's a process. It's gradual.

The STP seeks to provide opportunities to those under-represented in the film/TV industries, including those from racialised backgrounds and people with disabilities. They were not entirely successful in this. During the selection interviews, when discussing candidates, one partner company representative was surprised to be told by the consultant:

Just to let you know the other production companies have all gone with a white [trainee]

Herself a woman of colour, she assumed that this was intended to prompt her to take the Black candidate, but she was concerned at the way the consultant chose to do this.

When trainees began their placement, they entered a production environment where they were highly likely to be in a minority and, potentially, to suffer discrimination.[4] Several Black trainees referred to experiences of overt racism on the scheme. One noted micro-aggressions in the office; another reported that colleagues repeatedly confused them with the only other Black employee in the company. Some trainees reported negative attitudes towards them from colleagues, including comments suggesting that participation in entry-level schemes amounted to 'positive discrimination':

I had someone tell me once actually … it's quite shocking, they told me that my success is only down to the colour of my skin.

Isolation in the workplace, which is often compounded by where trainees are multiply minoritized, can shape the traineeship experience with the potential to impact on trainees' sense of belonging. Mentoring is a promoted feature of the STP and will be discussed in more detail below. We note here, however, that this relationship is often likely to be shaped by racial and social inequality that has the potential to impact on trainees' experiences, learning and career development. As might be anticipated given data on the racial diversity of the sector (CDN 2020)[5] racially minoritized women are acutely aware of the barriers to career progression in the industry. Similarly, Banks (2017) highlights the potential for diversity schemes that select/promote individuals on the basis of individual characteristics to fuel discrimination. Further, as the quote below suggests, too singular a view of 'diversity' hides intersectional effects.

I definitely felt disassociated in my company sometimes because I was so different. There were a few Black people in my company but they did come from very different backgrounds … the majority of the people of colour in my company … went to private schools and all this thing. So while we may have a similar ethnic background, you know, class-wise and in terms of interest they were completely different.

Yet underlying several of the interviews that we carried out, was a strong current of loneliness and isolation, despite attempts to formally support trainees through mechanisms such as mentoring. This echoes the findings

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4.   The Creative Diversity Network (CDN) reported in 2021 that ethnic minority representation in senior television roles remained stagnant at 9%, while disabled workers stayed below 5% for five years (CDN, 2021). Maternal careers are jeopardized by childcare needs (Wreyford et al., 2021). Exploitative, unsafe, and bullying-prone conditions persist in the creative sector, as indicated by ongoing research and advocacy.
5.   Race and Ethnic Diversity: A Deep Dive into Diamond Data CDN 2020

of a recent report which argues that loneliness is the single leading influence on film and TV workers' mental health (Film and TV Charity, 2023). As this report argues, 'the remedy for loneliness involves improved quality of relationships, not simply additional social contacts' (ibid: 8).

Some current and former trainees have spoken about how they tried to minimise the impact of racism in the workplace by, for example, creating virtual networks with other ethnically minoritized trainees and taking on the burden of educating others in the company by setting up anti-racist groups, or supporting the company in developing their formal EDI initiatives. However, it was notable that this additional labour taken on by some trainees did not seem to be recognised or valued by the scheme or the production companies.

Our research to date suggests the value of helping to support networks and support structures for trainees. We believe that there is value in providing guidance to placement providers to enable them to recognise the various, sometimes small, ways in which trainees might feel challenged or excluded in the workforce. A reverse mentoring programme would be valuable in this respect.

The issue of diversity tokenism in training schemes is a complex and multifaceted challenge. Some participants expressed the view that diversity initiatives are often merely superficial, providing the appearance of inclusivity without substantial change:

'It feels like a façade. You know what I mean? Like, again, it's like it looks great. It sounds great. We're getting diverse people into the company. But we're still not being hired for things.'

This account, like some others, suggested that some ex-trainees found taking up careers in the sector beyond the program challenging. Being confronted by such barriers after taking up an opportunity that had felt like a 'golden ticket' could be very challenging for workers. In the context of the pervasive image of the sector as a meritocracy, some absorbed the idea that the challenges they had encountered reflected personal failings on their part.

Peer Support

Both current and previous trainees spoke about the importance of peer support within the traineeship cohort. Most ex-trainees we have interviewed are still in touch with their peer groups and have found them a critical source of emotional support and practical guidance during and beyond the traineeship. The following is indicative:

'We've got like a WhatsApp group chat that's been going since [several years ago]. And it's there's constantly stuff on there. People send the job. So just checking in and someone's just kind of [had an injury] and he's in hospital at the moment. So it's even kind of like, you know, a lot of personal stuff is in there. So, we've formed like a really tight friendship as well, I think.'

Some ex-trainees described using the peer support message groups established during the scheme over many years, to offer each other work, to ask one another professional questions that they feared might lead colleagues to patronise them or label them 'incompetent', and to share advice on negotiating contracts and rates of pay. This form of support was particularly important for racialised workers and women, who spoke of discrimination in the workplace often manifesting as colleagues undermining their professionalism and skills. Using such

networks to share work opportunities with one another allowed the scheme to have a long term legacy. Peer support on rates of pay and negotiating contracts provided a powerful form of solidarity in a sector often defined by fragmentation and a lack of openness about working conditions. Therefore, the informal peer support networks that emerge alongside the scheme are a way of coping with the difficulties of being 'different' within the sector, dealing with ongoing discrimination, inequality and everyday microaggressions[6]. There is a tendency to think about training schemes in terms of their ability to empower the individual, but the formation of peer networks represents one potentially useful way in which to respond to barriers to progression in the industry in ways that might be conceptualised as a 'collective capability' (Robeyns 2017:117).

On the job/ Formal learning

The STP integrates several different kinds of learning including formal training, on-the-job learning and mentoring. The formal training programme included a mix of specialist skills and knowledge (copyright, legal, advanced research and data 'wrangling' skills), an introduction to the industry (acronyms, roles and processes, the TV landscape) and general skills. Trainees are encouraged to map their skills across the course of the year. Formal 'training sessions' and documents were used by some ex-trainees, long after the scheme had concluded:

I still go and access some of the training documents that we had and at the time and some of the techniques that we were

taught, especially like finding work and like networking and stuff.

While the quote above highlights the informational value of the formal training, interviews suggested that this stage of the programme also provided an opportunity to ask questions about the industry, helping emerging workers with little or no knowledge or experience of the sector to feel prepared for the workplace. The training sessions also introduced trainees to people in the industry and, in some cases, challenged expectations about who worked in TV.

I really liked meeting the commissioning editor, I thought it was really interesting and she was like ... I think with Channel 4 and the people higher up, I always imagine it being really posh and she very much wasn't, she was very much proud of [being] from the North and was from a working class background ... it was quite nice to meet people and be like, 'oh actually this is quite a diverse workplace ...'.

Trainees tend to have some sense of the skills they want to develop over the course of the year. For some, technical skills (particularly shooting and editing skills) were highly valued. Women in particular spoke about the role of these technical skills in allowing them to challenge misogynistic stereotypes in the workplace. While the formal training includes some focus on technical skills, the main opportunity for trainees to develop these skills was in the on-the-job placement. There are inequalities here, with trainees having different opportunities to get involved in this aspect of work, which can be disappointing and frustrating for them. In line with research into training in the industry (Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009) trainees' on-

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6. It was not clear to us whether or not these peer support networks were officially encouraged by the training provider, but it certainly seemed that some were initiated by trainees independently, for instance a group just including workers of colour.

the-job learning is determined by their placement company, and what commissions have, or have not, been gained in the period they are there. This means that while some have a very rich production experience, others find it more challenging to gain practical experience. It can also mean that for some trainees the link between the formal and on-the-job learning is less secure. As one ex-trainee put it, looking back on the scheme:

You're just plunked in here, it's just it's potluck, really, how good [an]experience you get.

We also uncovered some issues around mentoring. This is an important part of the scheme and one way in which workers are supported to develop in film and TV more generally. One trainee reported feeling a bit lost as to how to make best use of their mentor. Another talked about the difficultly in connecting with their mentor. Interviews with production company staff also highlighted the differences in companies included in the scheme in terms of existing skills and knowledge about how to mentor well, as well as time and opportunities to do so. In some small companies, most had never had a mentor themselves, let alone undertaken any training on how to mentor effectively:

'I think the mentoring has worked really well because [the person who] is mentoring him, has done a lot of mentoring before. She's the one person who's come from being in house at [a large broadcaster] for like, forever, before she joined us. So she's very used to like 360 reviews and like targets and kind of, you know, all these things…the rest of us were all freelancers before, so we've never ever given feedback or received feedback.'

In the face of the precarious conditions encountered by small, independent production companies, offering trainees

a good experience of mentoring and professional development may be something they would like to do, but this does not mean it is achievable in practice.

Post scheme

The STP is considered a 'fast track' scheme. We have found some evidence that trainees develop a sense of a 'typical' trajectory through the industry (certainly for the bulk of trainees who begin in a researcher role). We found that trainees and ex-trainees were very conscious of the prestige that the scheme afforded, with several describing feeling like the opportunity was a 'golden ticket' into work in the sector. However, for some, the optimistic feelings they had about the programme led them to later internalise any problems they encountered in developing a stable and successful career in the screen industries as a personal failing, rather than understanding this in the context of structural inequalities they had faced within and beyond the programme. Trainees who required more adjustments at work sometimes found taking part in the scheme a really difficult experience:

I tried to speak up when it was health stuff as much as I could. But I felt especially more nearer the end, like I needed more support and I just felt like a nuisance, like my work was good and I was proud of the work I was doing. But it was just so mentally taxing… I know I by the end of it felt bittersweet because like I felt like I'd, because of my health and getting worse, I felt like I'd kind of ruined my own opportunity, I'd say.

The feeling of health needs and disabilities being a 'problem' in the workplace came up in several accounts and suggests that the scheme may

serve to teach emerging workers with these needs that they cannot expect to be accommodated by work in the sector. The experience of this trainee - in which health issues felt like a personal failing – suggests that the scheme can, potentially, reinforce rather than overturn existing hierarchies and exclusions.

Trainees finished the scheme with more or less developed networks and knowledge of the industry. There was also evidence of a mid-career struggle for some trainees, particularly in the move from AP to Producer. This is not uncommon in the industry, but we are interested in whether the STP confers a long-term advantage by giving trainees resources to draw on to support them in this transition, or whether, in contrast, minoritized groups are likely to encounter more barriers to progression in the sector, regardless of their entry route. This question would merit further research, as understanding barriers to progression is an important element of addressing the diversity problem in the screen industries.

The accounts of current and past trainees suggested that staff of the training provider do a lot to support the development of trainees, both within the scheme and beyond. Some past trainees spoke about having stayed in touch with staff and getting advice at crucial moments of transition, for instance when negotiating a new contract. One ex-trainee explained that she had remained in contact with both the broadcaster and training provider:

It it probably exceeded expectations because I didn't expect that kind of level of support. And even now I'm still in touch with [the training provider], and just had a phone call with her the other day. And you know, she's always there. The [broadcaster] team are always there. And for former trainees, it's not like once you've entered the scheme, you, you're

off into the big wide world by yourself. They're actually really, really supportive.

This ongoing labour of care is expansive, going well beyond what is formally provided by the STP. While these sustained relationships are arguably dependent on unpaid labour by staff of the training provider, it also allows them to make the most of connections, to capitalise on talented individuals and showcase success stories of their business. We are also concerned that ongoing opportunities are not universally available to all trainees and suggest that this might serve to reinforce rather than challenge existing inequalities in the sector.

4. WHAT NEXT?
ACTION POINTS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Screencraft Traineeship Programme is a constructive step forward. Most of our informants spoke positively about it, reported gaining valuable skills and a welcome introduction to the sector. Of particular value was the fact that it extended to a year. It enabled many young people who would otherwise have struggled to access the sector to participate, opening up this work to diverse voices. It also provided many small production companies with additional, subsidised resources. We have no desire to condemn it, nor do we expect the broadcaster organising and funding this to entirely resolve societal discrimination.

We do, however, have some practical recommendations for ways in which the scheme could be improved:

Support for a greater diversity of trainees. Some of the trainees we spoke to required only access to the sector and an opportunity to learn the necessary skills in order to carve out successful careers for themselves. For these the scheme worked well. For others, particularly neuro-diverse, care-leavers or trainees with mental health problems, unsupported exposure to the industry simply set them up to fail. Many of their issues could have been addressed with some additional scaffolding, from emotional support to less intense schedules or active mentoring. The companies that we spoke to actively engaged with their trainees, seeking regular feedback and making amendments where possible, but we are aware that not all had the expertise or resources for this. We suggest setting up an Employment Support Fund to ensure that trainees are able to access the resources which will allow them to participate in the sector. This could be run centrally by the broadcaster.

Support for production companies. Partner organisations varied from super-indies to small production companies. While the former were well-resourced with professional support staff, the latter often had little experience of mentoring or training and no access to professional HR. For these, we recommend the broadcaster provide support through access to its HR department. This might cover professional advice and guidance and

opportunities to attend internal training.

Workplace experience. Trainees' experiences of work varied considerably. Some had access to a number of productions, others, disadvantaged by the cycle of work in their host companies, accessed a far narrower range of work, making the scheme a lottery. This could be improved by ensuring that, during the 12 months, trainees had experience of both large and small companies with exchanges brokered by the broadcaster.

Including Trainees' voices. Employee engagement and feedback would help to highlight and deal with some of the issues the trainees experienced, including the racism shown to black participants. A trainees' forum, perhaps as part of wider staff engagement, could bring forward experiences and provide a voice for ways in which these could be handled.

Communication, collaboration and record keeping. The broadcaster kept surprisingly few records of past and current trainees and partners, resulting in little organisational memory and no broadcaster co-ordination of the STP. Co-ordination was outsourced to the consultancy firm and some past trainees reported receiving regular contact above and beyond that initially promised, long after the scheme had finished. This was welcome, but communications with the broadcaster itself could have been significantly better. Improving these and providing a platform for both trainees and partner organisations to meet, collaborate and share experiences could provide a straightforward way of improving practice across the sector.

Concluding thoughts

It's crucial to recognize that initiatives like the STP, while valuable, cannot single-handedly dismantle deeply rooted systemic issues within the industry. The scheme, on its own, is not equipped to overcome the vast inequalities prevailing in the field. Expecting it to resolve all the problems associated with diversity discourse, as highlighted by scholars such as Nwonka (2020) and Saha (2018), is unrealistic. However, it's equally important to acknowledge the potential power of such schemes in challenging these issues. The intersectionality of race, gender, class, and mental health significantly shapes the landscape of the television industry. People who do not fit the mould of the typical worker often find themselves at a severe disadvantage from the very beginning. To address these challenges, radical recognition of the industry's socially stratified, predominantly white, gendered, classed, ableist and neurotypical culture is essential. Understanding how this culture perpetuates wider social inequalities is a crucial first step.

Taking active measures to address the structural issues that inhibit access and inclusion into the screen industries is vital. This means breaking down the barriers that hinder the entry – and progression – of Black, disabled, neurodivergent, working-class, women, and queer workers into the industry. We believe that mentorship programs can play a pivotal role. Building on the informal peer support networks that some trainees described, we suggest pairing aspiring professionals from marginalised communities with experienced mentors within the industry could provide them with valuable guidance, advice, and connections. These relationships could act as a counterbalance to discrimination, helping some minoritised workers to get in and get on, despite systemic biases. Promoting a more inclusive culture within television production companies is imperative in tackling the diversity problem in television production. This would involve creating safe spaces where employees could openly discuss their experiences and challenges, encouraging dialogue that might enable a more profound understanding of diverse perspectives. Company-wide training programs that address unconscious biases and promote cultural competence among staff could also contribute significantly to creating a more inclusive environment.

Despite the importance of interventions which seek to improve access to work in the screen industries, there is only so much that small-scale initiatives like entry-level traineeships and mentoring interventions can achieve, in the face of powerful systemic barriers. Insights from research with production company workers highlighted that small, independent companies may not actually be able to be inclusive to some forms of diversity. For instance, many production companies operate on very tight budgets and timelines, so cannot realistically accommodate staff absences or the shorter hours and slower pace of work that might be necessary to include workers with mental health needs, some disabilities and certain chronic illnesses. In this instance, neither entry-level schemes or open dialogue do not offer a complete solution as the barriers to diversity are structural.

In understanding the affordances and limitations of interventions that seek to address the lack of diversity in television production, gathering rigorous evidence and reflecting regularly is crucial. Companies participating in such initiatives must engage in transparent reporting, including regular assessments and evaluations which consider both the short and long-term efficacy of the programmes, to identify who they work for, who they do not, and where further efforts are necessary. Striving for a more equitable sector depends on this ongoing process of reflection and improvement.

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