



# CAREERS GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FOR MEDIA STUDENTS

Dr Laura Mayne, Dr James Zborowski and Dr Sheena Macrae, University of Hull

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## Summary

- Media students lack detailed and realistic knowledge about what jobs are available in the UK creative industries, how to find them, and about how career progression works beyond entry-level roles.
  - Careers advisors report that they lack good and up-to-date knowledge in relation to creative careers.
  - Networks used to find work are less available to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those who live away from centres of creative industries activity.
  - Demand for work experience outstrips supply due to the volume of activity in different geographical areas, practical considerations (for example, schedules and insurance) and limited incentives.
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## Recommendations for policy

1. Education providers should supplement traditional placements with two other forms of activity:
  - i) Mock selection-day activities run by large production companies/broadcasters, which can be delivered at scale and if necessary, on-site at the institution provider
  - ii) Simulated media production activities, delivered by industry professionals, but without the high stakes and the legal issues that surround real-life productions, thus increasing the scope for authentic learning. Regional screen organisations are well-placed to help coordinate and facilitate such activity.
2. Education providers should include industry guests from a range of roles and at different career stages. Engagement with industry would promote interaction and sustained relationships, including coaching or mentoring.
3. All careers units should be aware of the resources offered by ScreenSkills. Education providers should routinely integrate ScreenSkills resources into their careers offer to media students.

## Context

The *Bridging the Expectation Gap* research project, funded by the Screen Industries Growth Network at the University of York, and delivered by the University of Hull, set out to examine the gaps between media students' expectations of careers in the creative industries, and the working realities of the sector. The project conducted questionnaires and focus groups with further education students in Yorkshire and the Humber to assess their knowledge and understanding of entry-level roles in, skills required for, and routes into the creative industries. It also reviewed paperwork for a range of Media qualifications, and interviewed course tutors.

The screen industries are growing, and in particular the scale and scope of the Yorkshire and Humber screen industries is increasing rapidly: between 2015-18 the region grew by 116% compared to 11% nationally (Swords and Townsend, 2019: 6). The screen industries are important to the UK economy, however it is also widely accepted among academic researchers and industry stakeholders that severe skills shortages threaten to stunt this growth, that education and training does not match pace of technological change, and that the regional screen industries, while growing at an impressive scale, remain inconsistent in terms of the training and opportunities provided for new entrants.

## Key findings

It is difficult for providers of pre-university media qualifications (such as BTECs, A-levels, Cambridge Technicals, and the UAL award) to meet the demand for work experience in the screen industries among their cohorts. This is a result of various factors, including the structure, working patterns, and insurance and confidentiality requirements of the creative industries. It has significant implications for the rollout of T-levels in the area of Media, given the emphasis of that suite of qualifications upon meaningful work experience opportunities. The substantial work experience component of T-Levels might be hard to deliver in the area of Media, and might therefore risk exacerbating regional inequalities.

- A high proportion of Media students aspire to careers in the creative industries.
- Those students often lack a clear sense of how to access the best information about career paths and job opportunities, tending to rely on social media and generic job sites rather than specialist sources.
- Students reported high levels of satisfaction with their media courses, and embraced the blend of theory and practice offered (in differing proportions) by most courses.
- They also often lack detailed knowledge of entry-

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**[INTERVIEW RESPONSE]**

level and ‘below-the-line’ roles (eg. production coordinator, researcher, talent assistant). In the vivid words of one commentator, ‘they don’t know what their first job is’.

- Students outside of centres of creative production often have limited access to professional creative networks and to work experience opportunities. These problems can be exacerbated for learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds who do not have familial contacts.
- Information about the working realities of the creative sector, in terms of matters such as precarity and freelance working, is not as visible in the curriculum as it ought to be.
- In further education, demand for media-related work experience and the availability of meaningful work experience in the creative industries outstrips supply.

The research also revealed innovative practices aimed to deliver the same benefits as traditional, placement-based forms of work experience, but able to operate at scale, such as students working to briefs set by industry professionals, or conducting simulated work experience activities. These inform the recommendations above.

## Further information

Link to full report: [eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/215099/](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/215099/)

Dr Laura Mayne, Lecturer in Film and Media, [l.mayne@hull.ac.uk](mailto:l.mayne@hull.ac.uk)

Dr James Zborowski, Senior Lecturer in Film and Television Studies, [j.zborowski@hull.ac.uk](mailto:j.zborowski@hull.ac.uk)

Dr Sheen Macrae, Co-convenor of the BSA Digital Sociology Study Group [semacraephd@outlook.com](mailto:semacraephd@outlook.com)

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