BIRMINGHAM CITY University

DIVERSITY IN UK POST-PRODUCTION SOUND

The Update - Revisited 2025

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FOREWORD

This research, conducted throughout August 2024 to January 2025, is a follow up to the Diversity in UK post-production Sound report published in 2020, funded by the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity. The aim of repeating this research process is to see whether the industry has achieved progress, stayed the same, or regressed in terms of the diversity of the post-production sound workforce.

In order to get a sense of the wider landscape, the research examined the top 15 highest rated UK TV shows (with post-production sound based in the UK) on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One, each month across a 3 month period (August, September and October 2024) to identify the gender, racial and class diversity across the key post-production sound team roles. This initial data was accessed from *Broadcast* magazine's 28-day consolidated genre overview tables on highest rated shows (published online 2024), on screen credits, and IMDB. This research also involved interviews with a diverse range of professionals working in post-production sound in the UK to identify barriers to career progression in this area. This research evidences a worrying absence of diversity in post-production sound teams.

This research was undertaken by Emma Butt an experienced post-production sound professional and Ellie Tomsett a media researcher based at Birmingham City University.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following data relates to the top 15 highest rated shows, each month, across 6 UK broadcasters (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky One) from a three month period (August - October of 2024) resulting in 32 shows total; after shows without post-production sound were removed from the sample. There were 67 available sound roles across these shows, these were undertaken by a total of 57 people. It is worth noting that some people from the data set worked on more than one show.

Out of those 57 people, 32 people responded to requests to confirm their identity in relation to gender, race and class.

- 24 people identified as men (75%).
- Only eight people identified as women. This is a small increase (an extra two women) from the 2020 research.
- Only two people identified as being from an underrepresented racial background (6%). This is an increase of one person since the 2020 research.
- Five people identified as having a non-physical disability. An increase of four people since the 2020 research.
- Class diversity was captured and nine people identified as coming from a working-class background. This evidences the importance of class when considering barriers to entering a career in post-production sound.
- The sample of job roles included 13 Dubbing Mixers, 11 Sound Effects Editors, seven Dialogue Editors and one all-rounder. The previous report identified only one woman in a dubbing/ re-recording mixer role, in this data collection three were identified.

The interview stage of this research, conducted with 8 post-production sound professionals, highlighted the following:

- Instances of racism and racial insensitivity are experienced by people of colour working in the industry.
- Harassment and inappropriate behaviour has been, and continues to be, experienced by women in the industry.
- The informal hiring practices of post-production sound create barriers to increasing diversity.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 we undertook initial research into why the industry, UK film and television production, had such difficulty attracting and retaining diverse staff into post-production sound roles. The report that came from that research, published in 2020, was written in the context of a significant amount of discussion about the lack of racial and gender diversity in the UK film and TV industry, as detailed in the work of Henry and Ryder (2021). This was observed as an issue both in front of, and behind the camera, and new schemes and initiatives were being set up to help establish a more diverse workforce. These included Channel 4's "Black to Front",[1] ITV's Diversity Acceleration Plan,[2] and Netflix's commitment of $5 million globally for Black not for profits, creators and Business.[3] These initiatives, however, rarely (if ever) included post-production teams in their remit.

The 2020 report concluded that, out of a sample of 55 people who worked in post-production sound on the top rated shows of the previous quarter, there was a lack of gender and racial diversity in the industry. That report concluded that only six out of 55 people identified as women and shockingly all but one of the people were white. Three people out of the 55 self identified as having a disability. There was only one Re-Recording mixer who identified as a woman, they worked only in factual TV. No women were working as Re-Recording mixers in Drama within the 2020 sample.

In 2024, four years on from the initial report, and an upswing in public discourse about racial and gender discrimination in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests, we wanted to understand whether the issues identified previously had been addressed? Is there now more support for diverse post-production talent to enter the industry, or once in a post-production career, progress in their chosen field? Are we seeing more people from diverse backgrounds progress to Head of Department (HOD) roles, or are there barriers still holding them back? Crucially, has any tangible progress been made since the initial report and is this evident in the data?

As with the first report, it is important to acknowledge researcher positioning in relation to the area of study. As a mixed-race woman who has worked in the industry for over 17 years, Emma is still continually faced with being one of the only women on most sound teams and often the only woman on the whole post team. Emma has personally experienced sexism and bullying and struggled for years to progress into high end drama as a Re-Recording Mixer, before pivoting to a Dialogue Editor role, when someone took a "risk" on hiring her. As Emma's ethnic identity is not visually evident, she has not personally faced racism in the workplace (although she has experienced racism in her lifetime). Emma's positioning as an insider within both the industry and cultural contexts under analysis was central to this research.

[1] https://assets-corporate.channel4.com/_flysystem/s3/2022-06/Channel%204%20-%20The%20Black%20to%20Front%20Project%20-%20FINAL%20%28Accessible%29.pdf *Accessed 13 Feb 2025*

[2] https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/news-and-resources/itv-announces-diversity-acceleration-plan *Accessed 13 Feb 2025*

[3] https://blavity.com/entertainment/netflix-commits-5m-to-black-nonprofits-for-creators-youth-and-businesses and https://about.netflix.com/en/news/amplifying-diverse-british-voices-in-front-of-and-behind-the-camera *Accessed 13 Feb 2025*

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods were used simultaneously to understand the numerical and experiential position of post-production sound workers within the current UK industry. As, subsequent to the 2020 report, the author Emma Butt has been asked to talk publicly about the issues with diversity in the industry this may have coloured the judgement of people being asked to participate this time round. This is because the impact of the first report was significant, and as such potential interviewees may have been concerned that they would be identifiable if from a minority group and being critical of the industry that employs them. Ethical approval was sought and granted (by Birmingham City University) for this project. All participants have been pseudonymised, and given the opportunity to read, reflect and amend or withdraw their contribution before publication.

This research explores the barriers to career progression that relate to women and those who come from an underrepresented background, and whether there are commonalities in experiences. Additionally, this research considers exactly what actions can be taken to remove these barriers to ensure wider inclusion in the post-production sound profession.

DIVERSITY OF WORKFORCE ON HIGHEST RATED SHOWS

In order to understand the wider landscape of the diversity of the post-production sound workforce the highest rated UK TV shows across a 3 month period of 2024 were identified. The industry magazine, *Broadcast*, publicly publishes a 28 day consolidated genre overview table of the highest rated shows across BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One, the date each show aired and the viewing figures. For the purposes of this research any live sporting events, shows which do not require post-production sound work (e.g. BBC1's Strictly Come Dancing [2004-]), and duplicates were omitted from the data, this left 32 shows in total.

Once the relevant highest rated shows had been identified we found the names of the sound teams involved on the specific episodes. This was achieved through a combination of searching on IMDB and reviewing the end screen credits. As the highest rated shows were from a variety of genres (e.g. drama, entertainment, factual) and the make-up of sound teams vary across each genre, we decided to focus on the key common sound roles found in each one. These are as follows; Re-Recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor and Sound Effects editor.

With TV drama production, the roles of Re-Recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor and Sound Effects Editor are covered by different people. In some cases, for example on productions with higher budgets, these roles may be undertaken by multiple people due to the scale of the production. Conversely, when producing factual and entertainment work, all three roles can be covered by one individual. Both of these kinds of programming and levels of participation in the post-production sound process was evident in this data sample.

Once all names of those in the key sound roles covered in the sample had been confirmed, we personally contacted every person directly via email to request their age, gender, career level, ethnicity and to ask whether they identified as having a disability, impairment or learning difference. We also asked them to identify their class background using standard class indirect indicator questions about education level and background. It was necessary to contact people individually so that people could self-identify against these identity categories. We provided a consent form and an information sheet about the project, and its data handling protocols as part of this process. It was made clear that data would not be attributed to individual respondents but presented as percentages for the whole sample.

A summary of the findings from this aspect of the data collection can be found in the table below (Table 1). Some categories have been conflated to ensure individuals cannot be identified.

Table 1. Summary of respondents identity characteristics (self-identified)

Identified as	% (n)
Male	75% (n=24)
Female	25% (n=8)
White	94% (n=30)
Global majority racial identity	6% (n=2)
Disabled	16% (n=5)
Working class	28% (n =9)

The resulting data provides insight into the post-production sound workforce diversity in 2024. Out of 57 people working across a total of 32 shows, 32 people responded providing information on their gender, identity, ethnicity, class, sound role and if they identified as having a disability. Some people responded and chose not to confirm any details, others did not reply. It should also be noted that dissimilarly to the last round of research, when Emma Butt's advocacy was not widely known, some people approached for this aspect of the research responded in an openly hostile manner, objecting to this research taking place, and making it clear that they felt this research was unnecessary. Some people were not contacted as contact details for them were unable to be found.

Interviews

The numbers from the quantitative research are of course shocking, but numbers alone do not provide the explanation as to why we are still seeing such a disparity in the participation of women and global majority people when compared to their white male counterparts.

To better understand the barriers women and people from underrepresented backgrounds are facing in progressing in their careers, we interviewed 8 men and women from underrepresented backgrounds (including a white man who identifies as working-class). Each participant was at a different stage in their career and faced different challenges. In the table below (Table 2.) the ethnic background of participants is intentionally kept general, as to be more specific in an industry where there are so few people from underrepresented backgrounds could make participants identifiable. It was not possible, simply based on who volunteered to participate in an interview to include disabled people for this part of the research - as the industry is relatively small it would also have been very difficult to ensure anonymity of disabled participants. Interviews for this report took place in the Summer of 2024 and we interviewed everyone who volunteered to participate. Closer to publication in early 2025, one participant chose to withdraw their consent due to fear of repercussions.

This was in part related to the changing attitude towards Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) within the film and TV industry, as evidenced by the erasure of DEI roles across broadcasters and streamers. Finding participants to take part in this report had already been challenging as there are so few people from underrepresented backgrounds working within the post-production sound sector.

The interview data was coded into themes based on commonalities in discussions with participants. We present findings below in relation to 1) Working culture, 2) Isolation, 3) Sexism and parenthood, 4) Abuses of power, 5) Training and career support.

Table 2. Summary of interviewees identity characteristics (self-identified)

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity
Cathal	Man	Underrepresented background
Siobhan	Woman	White
Niamh	Woman	White
Mikey	Man	Underrepresented background
Annabel	Woman	White
Catherine	Woman	White
Oisin	Man	White

WORKING CULTURE

There were common themes among the participants' responses with regards to finding and keeping work. Cathal, Siobhan and Niamh all commented about the drinking culture they faced at the start of their careers.

Siobhan commented:

> *"There was so much pressure to be one of the boys, to earn your respect. Many times I drank myself under the table because people would go to the pub at lunch and they wouldn't go back to work."*

When asked about whether this felt optional, Siobhan talked about how "there was a pressure to drink and [...] not just to have a drink, but a pressure to get drunk". They remembered feeling like they "wanted to impress, but then also feeling so out of control of the whole situation". Siobhan made it clear that their participation in this drinking culture was not because they wanted to, but because they believed there would be career consequences if they did not. They said "Not that anyone explicitly said it, but it was yeah, [...] you were either the unlikable one, or you went out and you matched everybody else". Both Siobhan and Niamh highlighted that this was also an environment where they were often the only woman. This speaks directly to the pressure on women to assimilate into existing male dominated work cultures and the importance of these 'informal reputation economies' (Gill, 2014: 519) for finding and retaining work in the industry.

Niamh also reflected on the way certain behaviours can alienate women when entering the industry. She said that "the biggest issue was you had to be part of the boys' club. If they did the long lunches, you have to go out for the long lunch". This was seen as vital because

> *"That's when you heard about other jobs. That's when you had to make them [the hiring manager] like you [...]. At those lunches is when you would find out whether they were going to hire you again"*

They spoke about the extreme informality of these hiring practices noting that "there would be no kind of like bringing you in, sitting you down, talking about it", thus her employment rested solely on her attendance and participation in these social gatherings.

Most interviewees expressed feeling pressure to go out and drink in order to progress, even if financially (especially when in junior roles) it was difficult. Cathal, who identifies as being from a working-class background, spoke of their experience when first starting out and working as a runner within a facility. He commented that "I often wouldn't go out for Friday drinks and stuff because I couldn't afford to [...] but then that became like almost an offence to some of the other runners, including the head runner". This testimony demonstrates how specific working cultures can feel discriminative in an intersectional manner, both along gender and class lines in these instances. The issue here is not socialising with colleagues, the issue is the pressure to do so, and work being contingent upon this socialisation. This is consistent with what was discovered in our 2020 report which illuminated the informality of hiring practices in post-production sound as well as wider research into the UK Cultural Industries (for example, Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). This need to socialise and to make connections may be particularly important to those from working class backgrounds as, unlike many of their more economically privileged contemporaries, they do not arrive into the industry with existing contacts or potential sponsors/ mentors. As Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison identify in their book *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged* (2019), in the contemporary UK context 'important progression opportunities in many elite occupations do not just rest on competence but also a 'looking glass' version of 'merit' and class-cultural similarity' (Friedman and Lauirson, 2019: 111). Thus, the importance of engaging with working cultures and networking is clear.

[4] *For example - https://assets-corporate.channel4.com/_flysystem/s3/2022-06/Channel%204%20-%202022%20Commissioning%20Diversity%20Guidelines%20-%20FINAL%20%28Accessible%29.pdf and https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/site/diversity-inclusion-commissioning-guidelines-bbc-content.pdf (accessed 13th Feb 2025)*

ISOLATION

Although there has been significant discourse about how to ensure gender and ethnic minority diversity in the industry, as well as talk about supporting women if they choose to become parents, in practice not a lot has been done to support this in post-production. Commissioning guidelines across the broadcasters to support better diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) on and off screen rarely if ever cover post-production.[4] At most the only role ever mentioned in guidelines is "Lead Editor" which is not a common role across all genres. Sound as a specific area is never mentioned.

Isolation (being the only one of a specific identity on a team) obviously works across multiple aspects of personal identity but perhaps is most notable in post-production sound with race and gender. This was evident in the data collected from the top-rated shows which highlighted how few women and global majority people are working in this area. Several of the women who were interviewed for this research mentioned how regularly they would be the only woman working in the post-production sound team.

This isolation becomes problematic in various ways. For example, in relation to racial identity, Cathal spoke about an experience of working on a production which included triggering racist content and being the only person of colour there. The post producer on the project was considerate enough to warn Cathal about the content before they began work on the project and gave them the opportunity to decide if they wanted to work on it, which they decided to do. However, during a viewing of the project, the client asked for focus to be put on a specific racial slur for dramatic effect, and Cathal recalled that he

> *"Had to just switch my emotions off and [...], just be matter of fact. The person that I was working with [...] then said, yeah, 'turn the [racist slur] up'. I remember turning, and the director winced as well. He was a white guy."*

Cathal noted that there was no diversity amongst the production team and "There were certain discussions that were being had around the storytelling [...] [when] there was no diversity on the project". They noted that this wasn't an unusual experience and that they often found themselves to be part of an all-white team, commenting that on bigger jobs "security and cleaners" would be the only people of colour they would see.

[4] *For example - https://assets-corporate.channel4.com/_flysystem/s3/2022-06/Channel%204%20-%202022%20Commissioning%20Diversity%20Guidelines%20-%20FINAL%20%28Accessible%29.pdf and https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/site/diversity-inclusion-commissioning-guidelines-bbc-content.pdf (accessed 13th Feb 2025)*

The most worrying encounter Cathal spoke about was having a conversation and joking with a white female colleague one day when, while joking around, she started screaming rape "as a joke". He commented that:

> *"Someone else saw it. There were two other people in the room as well. [...] She was just like, no, I'm joking [...]. I just left. I just left the space. I feel like I've got to leave the situation immediately because of [my racial identity] in this situation. And that's going to be the thing that's going to make things potentially a thing, make things plausible or make a story from it."*

The experience that Cathal shared in the interview highlighted the complexities of working in overwhelmingly white spaces and how this can result in racial ignorance and a hostile working environment. This particular instance shows the problematic nature of banter that makes light of rape culture and how this can be particularly difficult for men of colour due to racial stereotypes.

SEXISM AND PARENTHOOD

Most of the women interviewed highlighted a concern about whether choosing to start a family (or indeed already having one) would impact their ability to be hired, continue working, or prevent progress to senior supervising roles. This was an issue that also came out in the findings of the 2020 report. Age is obviously a factor for this particular barrier. As women progress to the stage in their career where they may look to a HOD role, this can coincide with a time when they may want to start a family. Contributors to this report detailed being told that if they wanted to have a family, they would have to leave the industry, or they would have to sacrifice ever being a HOD or sound supervisor.

Niamh provided an example of this issue of parenthood playing out. She recalled that:

> *"I was told on my first job, if I want to have kids, [I'm] never going to work again in the industry. And the evidence was there [...] because the only women I had as examples, had kids and left the industry".*

Interviewees highlighted the importance of finding the right hiring managers to enable working mothers to stay in the industry. Niamh commented that "I've got to find reasonable enough supervisors, I still get the job done, I just don't want conventional hours. I still have to put my kids first, but your job will get done" and this flexibility is not always accommodated.

Niamh also felt that this was a gendered issue in that it was mostly male colleagues implying that she could not be both a mother and have a successful career in post-production sound. She identified that often "men who had children, [said] you will never work in this industry. And they had a valid point because they don't foster an environment where you can".

However, not all of the participants felt their gender had a negative impact on their career, when speaking with Annabel about their treatment by male colleagues, they felt any mistreatment or sexism had been minimal. They said "I feel sometimes a little bit like I just maybe don't notice these things. Or maybe, I'm not as subject to them as some others". They did go on to acknowledge that sometimes subtle things may occur due to their gender, for example while in a studio environment with a male colleague, the client would direct all notes to the male colleague and would barely look at them. Annabel's testimony evidences that it is possible to navigate a career without experiencing overt sexism, and in fact be championed by male colleagues, however this was the minority experience of our interviewees. Sexism remains an enduring issue across many industries, so it is not surprising that it endures in post-production sound too.

ABUSES OF POWER

Although in 2016 #MeToo shone a light on some of the workplace issues impacting women in creative and entertainment industries (Boyle, 2018), and there was a hope this new openness would limit inappropriate encounters in the workplace for women, interviewees discussed concerning stories regarding instances of abuses of power.

One participant, Niamh, described how, after being professional and friendly to a male client (as is expected in any job role while working as an assistant at a junior level), the client contacted her manager asking for her personal mobile number. It was made clear to her manager this was not for work related purposes.

After she declined this request, the manager ignored her wishes and gave her number out anyway. This resulted in repeated unwanted phone calls and texts that made her feel uncomfortable. She said:

> *"I got so many calls and messages [....] and I was made to feel like I had to keep him happy [as he was still a client]. But this is part of the issue with all of these producers, directors, [...] it's why Me Too was so important because no one can say no to them and they [facilities] don't want to lose them [as clients]."*

Fundamentally from Niamh's perspective, it was clear that her safety and wishes were not the priority, commenting that "you want to keep the client happy, and it doesn't matter if you make a [junior member of staff] unhappy." In this particular case, there was someone else in the company she could report this too, however nothing was done. This illustrates how harassment can be ignored, or as was the case here, facilitated, by those in positions of power within post-production. The current economic context means that the need to attract and retain clients can be used as an excuse to not take concerns about personal safety seriously.

TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

All participants spoke about a lack of training opportunities both as freelancers and staff. Mikey being at the beginning of their career spoke of the difficulty they found entering the industry after leaving university. Although they applied for multiple entry level positions at facilities and got to the interview stage, they never progressed. They found training schemes available for location sound but none for post-production sound, which was their target role, commenting that "I think post-production would benefit from a training scheme".

Even sound professionals who work in house within a facility structure face a similar challenge. They can, however, be supported by senior members of staff and have some training provided, and as a result clients (producers, directors and production companies) can be made to feel that less of a risk is being taken in the appointment of staff within that context. In reality the workload for sound professionals at the start of their career often means there is not enough time for that training to happen. Also, now that in-house teams are so small due to the same financial constraints that productions face, facilities often do not have the financial means to progress a member of staff and hire someone new to replace them.

Lack of training was a common theme amongst all of the participants with Catherine and Oisin both highlighting lack of training from their employers. Oisin felt they had to train themselves and Catherine also stated that a lack of training resulted in jobs taking longer for them to complete than necessary. However, Catherine has never been given any extra time to compensate for the lack of training from their employers. As a result of this situation, the pressure felt so much that they contemplated leaving the industry multiple times as "I was like, I don't know if this is for me, I was [...] annoyed because I tried so hard [...] [it's] taking me ages to get here, and now I'm just, not happy'.

Even though Catherine was only given little training by their employers, when a new employee started in their department, she was expected to train the new member of staff in the job role. She commented that "I was more or less training them [...] I was getting to grips with it [the job role myself], I wasn't really in a position where I should have been doing that". This issue was compounded by the fact they were also not being paid appropriately to undertake this additional workload, "there were a lot of conversations along the way about I'd been hired on a junior salary as well, but then [I'm] running projects".

Although lack of training may impact all entrants into the post-production sound industry, it has specific consequences for those from minority backgrounds. When people of colour are put in the position of having insufficient time to train, they can feel additional pressure as they are often the only person of their race on a team. When I asked Cathal if they felt extra pressure being the only person of colour on a sound team they said:

> *"Yeah. It felt like extra pressure [...] But then I looked back and realized up to this point, I've had very little support [...] in terms of actually someone teaching me how to do this. But then I realized that unlike some of my other counterparts, I haven't had any formal training."*

When asked if they felt there was anywhere to get additional support as a freelancer, they said no. They felt that although schemes existed, they are rarely run by people from an underrepresented background who understood the challenges they faced, and that they always focused on shadowing opportunities. He commented that on previous schemes the focus had been on career advice but not actual experience, saying:

> *"Let's be honest, I want a job. I don't need to keep sitting down here and hearing the same advice. It almost makes me feel sometimes like I don't know what I'm doing, but I do."*

This reinforces how even if the advice given by training schemes is helpful, advice alone does not address what is really needed, the chance to build up credits and evidence experience. Those who had worked as staff spoke about "broken promises" of career development and training. While they were working under an "assistant" or "junior" title they were being tasked with carrying out much more senior work but not getting any financial uplift or receiving fair credit for their work.

Because of the freelance nature of much of the industry, sound professionals often act up and cover aspects of a more senior role (for ease, convenience or necessity) without this work being formally recognised. Sound professionals are struggling to move from assistant or junior levels to higher roles even when they have five or more years of work and training, and have often been doing the job of a more senior professional - without the pay level or credit.

Siobhan recalled starting with a company on what was originally only a six-month contract:

> *"I thought I would just do this for six months and that would be it. [...] it became very hard to get out because of all the false promises that I realized, eventually were false promises"*

Cathal also had experienced being misled by employers stating that "It's just like the amount of empty promises that you get given and how normalised empty promises are". After asking to move from documentary to scripted, which was agreed with their management, he found that while the company they worked for would schedule them to work on scripted jobs, a day or two before starting, their schedule would be changed removing them from the promised work. As a result of these shifting schedules they felt their career was being played with and asked to speak to management about what was happening. They discovered that another colleague in the current department they were trying to leave, was intervening and stopping them from progressing and

> *"They were just like, this person has stopped you from doing this job because they needed you here because you make more money for them here. We've been trying our best to move you across, but they keep sending off like emails complaining that they need you"*

In order for Cathal to progress in the area they wanted to work in, they had to leave the company.

These comments reflect the findings of the 2020 report, which found that if schemes do exist, they focus only on shadowing or mentoring but people need credits to progress. People will not hire someone based on how many times they have sat in the back of a room watching how a job is done, they hire based on how many times that person has actually done the job. But if no one is willing to let them do the job, how can they get any further in their career?

One of the key problem areas identified both in the 2020 and 2024 interviews was in relation to career progression, especially at mid-career level. Sound professionals in the middle of their career (so not just starting out but having not progressed to a senior or head role), especially freelancers, face some of the same issues that other professionals from diverse backgrounds across the industry have experienced. For example, if they would like to pursue a career in High End TV (HETV) but come from a short form content, documentary, or factual and entertainment background they are often deemed to "not have the right type of credits" by hiring managers. They are therefore instantly ruled out of prospective job roles in areas they are interested in pursuing.

It is still the case that without existing credits in a specific genre people can't progress, but to get the credits they need someone to take a chance on them. Due to the current state of the UK TV industry, with tightened and stretched budgets, and fewer shows being commissioned (as a result of over commissioning happening during the Covid pandemic, the writers and actors strike in the US during 2023, and the economic downturn facing the UK which resulted in less advertisement revenue), even fewer hiring managers are willing to take on anyone they don't know, or those without what they perceive to be existing relevant credits.

While mid-career development schemes now exist which allow people from the post-production sector to take part (such as the Film Forward or Make a Move schemes with Screen Skills, or the Women in Film and TV Mentor scheme), there is no industry financed training or scheme. This is with the exception of 4PP (Channel 4, 2023), a scheme that was developed by the author Emma Butt, as a direct response to the 2020 report. This initiative exists to help mid-career post-production talent progress by means of training, mentorship, and paid placements on productions where they receive a full credit at the end, the key to them progressing onto another job. 4PP directly targets people from underrepresented backgrounds. Crucially, all participants are being placed on a production in their chosen job role and genre, and this is fully paid by the scheme. This means the production faces no additional financial "risk" at taking on someone unknown to them, but the participant is also not expected to work for free in order to progress their career. This scheme is the first of its kind for UK post-production and is still ongoing with placements being arranged. It is similar in structure to the BBC's Continuing Drama New Directors Scheme, which no longer runs, but has proven to increase diversity across directors. The hope is that the same can be achieved through 4PP.

Overall, from the interview stage of this research it became clear that participants felt that gender stereotyping has impacted negatively on their careers, and that being a racial minority in the industry requires additional labour to get in and get on. Even after industry interventions, post-production sound is still behind in relation to diversity and inclusion. Training and career development support is drastically needed to help progress those struggling to advance to HOD roles, but also to support those who choose to have a family. Understanding and flexible working conditions are needed to retain highly skilled women within the sector.

[5] https://www.screenskills.com/bookings/film-forward-2025/a889f03d-0929-4016-8145-4390790f98b2/ and https://www.screenskills.com/industry/high-end-tv-skills-fund/make-a-move-high-end-tv/ *(accessed 13 Feb 2025)*

[6] https://www.wftv.org.uk/mentoring *(accessed 13 Feb 2025)*

[7] https://www.channel4.com/press/news/channel-4-launches-uk-media-industrys-first-post-production-development-programme *(accessed 13 feb 2025)*

[8] https://d3gujhbyl1boep.cloudfront.net/uploads%2F1534498780256-1us01ik1t7s-53673fec300aa64609cd02b8619dca90%2FDirectors+UK+Who%27s+Calling+the+Shots+August+2018+FINAL.pdf *(accessed 13 Feb 2025)*

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of analysing data from top rated shows and speaking directly with people working in post-production sound, it is clear there is still a lot of work to be done for the industry to become more inclusive. Practical training opportunities for people at all levels in post-production sound require more investment, both in relation to freelance and staff roles.

On screen credits are the only way for people to progress, especially with hiring managers who select staff for projects often coming from non-technical and sometimes non post-production backgrounds. For this to happen, there are two solutions.

1. Wider availability of training schemes is necessary, where participants don't just shadow experienced people, but fully take on the job role, in a supported way, so they have a chance to succeed. This training also needs to cover the living wage for participants, otherwise it creates a barrier of entry to working class people.

2. Practical experience needs to take priority over having the "right type of credits". Preventing someone from being hired for a job due to coming from a documentary background into HETV drama, or stepping up from an assistant role, is regressive and will contribute to the sector's already problematic skills gap. There is a need to look beyond the credits and instead judge candidates on their years of experience, demonstrated knowledge of technology, equipment, and workflows. If a candidate is less experienced in any of these areas, the question should be asked as to whether they can still be hired but supported in a practical way to help them progress.

In addition to rethinking training and experience, when junior team members are hired, a realistic expectation of their skill level needs to be considered. A formal training structure needs to be implemented, and support given. If people start to take on responsibilities outside of their original job specification, financial compensation needs to be forthcoming as well as a change in their job title.

Importantly, commissioning guidelines need to be re-written to explicitly include sound roles in the list of departments needing to address diversity and inclusion. As well as consideration of getting into the industry, an intervention is needed to help people from underrepresented backgrounds to progress to HOD roles. The talent is there but they are struggling to progress. Inclusion of sound roles within commissioning guidelines would create a greater need for underrepresented talent at HOD level.

In terms of fostering a safe environment in post-production sound, anonymous reporting structures need to be put in place at either company or broadcast level to allow staff and freelancers to report any sexual harassment, bullying or inappropriate behaviour. There is a fear of repercussions to careers if people speak up. Anonymous reporting is the only way to create a safe working environment, as recently evidenced by Knotts' (2024) report for the TV Industry Human Rights Forum.

Crucially, more formalised hiring practices need to be introduced across the sector. "Word of Mouth" or "down the pub" hiring approaches creates a barrier to those from underrepresented backgrounds. We need a system that creates an equal opportunity for all people to apply for available positions.

A diverse and inclusive environment within post-production sound benefits everyone, individuals and productions alike. We hope the findings and recommendations of this report can be used to make sorely needed tangible changes for those working in post-production sound in the UK.

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