



Film Skills needs in the Surrey, Enterprise M3 and Solent Local Skills Improvement Plan Areas

Executive Summary and Conclusions

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REPORT VERSION

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1) Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Hampshire and Surrey Chambers of Commerce to support the development of both the Enterprise M3 and Solent Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). Its primary focus is the skills needs within film and related industry sectors.

1.1 Report Objectives

The objectives of the project are to:

- Clearly articulate employers' skill requirements and outline the changes needed in the local area to adapt skills provision accordingly.
- Help foster a more dynamic relationship between employers and education providers within the local skills system.
- Encourage greater employer engagement in enabling and contributing to effective solutions.

For the purposes of this report the Film and Audio-Visual Sector is defined as including businesses and employment covered by the following SIC Codes.

1.2 Table 1 – Business Activities Included in the Film Audio Visual Sector

SIC code	SIC description
59.11	Motion picture, video and television programme production activities
59.12	Motion picture, video and television programme post-production activities
59.13	Motion picture, video and television programme distribution activities
59.2	Sound recording and music publishing activities
60.1	Radio broadcasting
60.2	Television programming and broadcasting activities

This report is intended as a provocation to inform discussion at the roundtable meeting scheduled to be held at Farnborough Studios.

2) Executive Summary

2.1 Data

The film and television industry across Surrey, Hampshire and the Solent is a dynamic, resilient, and significantly under-reported powerhouse. 6,000 Freelancers working in the sector drive growth in high end production across the London and South-East Cluster, and support audio visual media businesses, other aspects of the creative economy such as live events, as well as businesses in the wider economy.

The data unveils an industry far larger and more complex than previously understood, driven by a highly skilled, predominantly freelance workforce and contributing an estimated £919 million in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the region.

The film and Audio-Visual Sector in the EM3 and Solent LSIPs area has more than doubled in size between 2015 and 2025.

Around 3,400 Film Businesses are located in the area.

The sector supports a workforce of 11,490 people. 4,300 people are employed, the remaining 7,190 freelance, work on short term contracts or are self-employed.

2.2. Overview	
2.2.1 <i>The future trajectory of the screen film and audio-visual sector is uncertain</i>	For over a century demand for increasingly interactive and immersive content has grown. Technology change has driven innovation and job growth. However, ease of international outsourcing and the use of AI are driving structural changes, which may again drive future growth or alternatively could reduce demand for labour in the industry.
2.2.2 <i>The film sector should not be seen in isolation</i>	Convergence between the Tech Digital and the Creative Sector is driving innovation and growth. This growth is leading to increased demand for screen and audio-visual content both for entertainment and across the wider economy.
2.2.3 <i>The film sector has a unique structure</i>	In Surrey and Hampshire more than half the 11k workforce freelance. They support two eco systems. 60% of all Film and high-end TV production is delivered in the London and Southeast Cluster. This is serviced by production companies, which when developing ideas are small but then expand to deliver projects, before returning to their core existence when the project is completed. The second eco system is made up of video content businesses, which aim to have a steady flow of projects. Freelancers help smooth out peaks and troughs.
2.2.4 <i>The skills needs of the sector are not exclusive to the sector</i>	Skills shortages in the film sector tend to be focused in 3 areas. • Craft skills which are often developed outside the screen sector, • Production Skills which utilise generic organisational management and finance skills which are common to other parts of the economy. • Tech skills which are learnt on film courses but are increasingly in demand in the wider economy.

2.3 Nationally Identified Skills Priorities

2.3.1) *The Creative Industries Sector Plan*

In June 2025, the UK Government launched its [modern industrial strategy](#) which identified the creative sector as a driver of growth and included The Creative Industries Sector Plan.

The Plan commits the UK Government to increasing the productivity resilience and diversity of the creative workforce including freelancers. To achieve this aim, the UK Government proposes the following skills reforms.

Deliver Apprenticeships which meet the needs of the creative sector.

Introduce short courses funded by the Growth and Skills Levy.

Increase the availability of creative skills bootcamps.

Additionally, the UK Government will publish a post 16 Skills Strategy and work with industry to support training pathways through the Skills England, Creative Skills Forum.

2.3.1) The Screen Skills - [Sizing Up AMPERE Analysis](#) Report- provides a comprehensive overview of the state of skills in the industry. This report identifies the following priorities.

- Standardisation of Skills expectations for specified jobs, and the use of Skills Passports to show how members of the workforce match these specifications.
- Training for mid-level professionals so they consolidate their position.

The Ampere report highlights how since the post Covid slowdown many freelancers in the industry are underutilised. (One freelancer explained that during the Covid boom they were working 3 days a week which was good money, now it's one day a week if they are lucky and it's a struggle)

The report therefore highlights the need for;

- Support for freelancers, Development of a common directory of crew and freelancers, which will match people looking for work with available opportunities.
- The need for a well-publicised dynamic diverse and affordable training offer including both bootcamps and modular short courses

2.4 Sector Voices

2.4.1) Education Perspectives – Both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) are delivering some remarkable achievements. FE Film courses are inspiring hard to reach learners to achieve qualifications they did not achieve at school. This provides a foundation for making the industry more inclusive. HE is achieving high levels of employability.

Pathways to employment, in particular for FE students are blocked by a lack of industry connectivity, an absence of work-based learning /placement opportunities and a shortage of opportunities for students to work on live projects.

However, some examples of excellent collaborative practice exist; Royal Holloway University is lead partner on the COSTAR Lab driving innovation in the Film Sector, The University of Surrey have led the development of the Guildford Games Cluster, and BFI film academies, have been delivered in the region by organisations such as City Eye.

2.4.2) Business views - Employers identify high demand for roles, but a shortage of candidates with the right skills. The small unit size of businesses and the nature of project work means some businesses are reluctant to offer work-based learning opportunities or work experience. Large studios and some of the media content companies are however striving to develop their workforce.

2.4.3) Infrastructure bodies and neighbouring LSIPs - Highlight the need to build connectivity across the London and South-East Cluster and to build business, freelancer, and education networks.

- The need for a well-publicised dynamic diverse and affordable training offer including both bootcamps and modular short courses

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

2.5.1 Building Connectivity

A key challenge is that the Film Audio-Visual and Screen sector, is extremely fragmented, poorly mapped and at local level not coordinated. Building connectivity is the foundation to establishing a strategic approach to skills development. Connectivity needs to be established over a functional geography, within the sector, and between the screen sector and the wider economy.

2.5.1.1 Building connectivity across the London and South-East Film Cluster.

Over 60% of UK filming activity occurs within the London super cluster, which extends into Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Solent, Bournemouth, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Essex. Greater coordination of skills provision is required over this geography. The BFI film cluster fund supports film London to coordinate work within the M25 and Resource Productions to develop the sector in Berkshire. While this funding will be reviewed in autumn 2025 it is unlikely the funding envelope will expand or that the lead agencies will change.

The One Creative North report (One Creative North, 2025) and partnership provides an example of how mayors, combined authorities and skills partnerships can work together across boundaries to support the development of a cluster, skills development and employment opportunity. A similar approach is needed across the greater South-East. Film offices in the area are already meeting and collaborating with each other regarding work on locations . Opportunity exists to build this collaboration across the LSIPs serving the area so as to achieve better coordination of the skills offer.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

Recommendation - The lead organisations driving LSIPs across the London Cluster should seek to work together to coordinate a film skills offer across the wider London and South-East Cluster. This work should include.

- The Directors of the Surrey and Hampshire LSIP's should work with partner LSIP leads across London and South-East to establish a cluster Skills Forum which would steer a collective approach to skills development across the Greater London and South-East Cluster. Membership would include LSIPs leads for the Film and Screen Sector and infrastructure bodies with a remit for skills such as Film London, Screen South, and Resource Productions. The forum would meet three to four times a year and be light touch. Its remit would include
- Building a common evidence base relating to the screen sector across the London and SE Cluster. This would include evidence relating to filming activity, workforce and skills needs.
- Coordinating the skills offer including the bootcamp modular courses , and CPD for FE Staff across the London and SE Cluster . When possible, reducing geographical barriers to participation in training. Freelancers and Industry entrants should be able to enrol on appropriate courses at any location in the cluster.
- Building a single website promoting training opportunities across the cluster.
- Building a common directory of freelancers and early-stage talent possibly using the Create Britain platform or the national crew directory being developed by Filming in England.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.1.2 Building connectivity within the industry locally.

Recommendations - The lead bodies for the Surrey M3 and Hampshire LSIPs should:

- **Establish Surrey and Hampshire film skills steering groups** - These would include business freelance and education sector representation. Film infrastructure bodies such as the Hampshire and Solent Film Office and Film Surrey may also wish to be involved. The steering groups role would be to provide a sector voice to influence the future skills agenda. The exact geography of the steering group or steering groups in the light of the planned local Government Reorganisation should be decided in consultation with the industry.
- **Commission live mapping and tracking of the film sector in the area** - The film skills steering group should commission an ongoing mapping of the industry and establish a local industry data base. This would track filming activity in the area, employment trends, training activity and skills needs. Ideally the same methodology would be used across the London and South East Cluster.
- **To Establish Surrey, Hampshire and Solent Film Business Networks and Freelancer / Crew Networks** - To consolidate work of creative catalyst and Farnborough Studios and establish both a curated network of Film based businesses in the combined LSIPs area, and a network of freelancers' crew and early-stage professionals.
- **To Develop an online directory of freelancer's crew and early-stage screen professionals** - A go to transparent online platform, which could broker the relationship between those wanting work in the sector and those offering work, should be established. Ideally the same platform would also be used in London, and all surrounding LSIPs areas. The [Create Britain](#) platform is currently used in the Solent Area. Filming in England are however developing a National Crew Directory

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.1.3 Building Connectivity between Film Businesses and Education.

Better connectivity between the Education Institutions and Businesses is crucial if more inclusive pathways to employment are to be developed.

Employers frequently observe college leavers and graduates are not work ready. They have not worked on live projects; they have not used state of the art equipment and software. They are not familiar with freelancing, they are not used to writing invoices and contracts, managing workflow, and may not have a unique tax number.

Education Institutions observe that they find it difficult to find live project experience for students. They also find it is difficult to recruit tutors, mentors, and lecturers with up-to-date industry experience as industry pay rates are higher than education pay. Few opportunities exist for student placements informal or formal (such as T level), Few employers are interested in offering apprenticeships. Further education in particular finds it hard to offer students opportunities to use industry standard equipment.

Recommendations

- **Establish one stop Listing of Placements** - The LSIPs lead body should broker and curate the establishment of a listing of placement opportunities for film students, and opportunities to work on live projects.
- **Intermediate Employers** - Opportunities to develop and replicate the Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Fareham college intermediate employment project should be explored. A listing of all the creative sector pathways to employment initiatives, including work undertaken by Artsworld should be developed.
- **University Industry Partnerships** - The region includes some leading examples of industry education partnerships. Royal Holloway University are lead partner in the £75m AHRC funded COSTAR Lab which leads innovation in the creative sector. Surrey University has played a key role in the formation of the Guildford Aldershot games cluster. The Academy for Contemporary Music owns metropolis recording studios who are recognised as industry leaders. This relationship gives students exposure to live experience of working at the cutting edge of the sector. More opportunity exists for:
 - ❖ Pioneering research to drive innovation in the sector
 - ❖ Knowledge transfer enabling students and staff to support businesses innovate.
 - ❖ Technology transfers enabling businesses and freelancer to make use of technology and software on university sites. This may include establishing incubators and startup labs.
- **Flexi Apprenticeships** - To explore the feasibility of engaging a cohort of employers in a flexi apprenticeship pilot, possibly in partnership with Solent institute of technology. This pilot might focus on production and project management skills, so as to be relevant the widest range of Createx industries.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.1.4 Building connectivity between the film and screen sector and the rest of the economy

The Film and AV sector, Games, Createch and the wider economy are becoming more closely convergent. The marine industries make increasing use of film and video services leading to the establishment of businesses such as Solent Sky in Portsmouth. A Fareham based business used a knowledge transfer partnership with Portsmouth University so that Games Students could design the interface for an aviation tracking tool. However, students trained in the Film Sector are frequently not aware of opportunities in the wider economy and businesses seeking tech talent are not aware of the talent pool stemming from the creative pathway to tech.

- **Recruitment Fairs** - Recruitment fairs where businesses seeking tech talent can meet creatives with tech skill should be organised.
- **Improved Career Guidance** - To work with partners so that the aspiration for better creative career guidance set out in the industry strategy, creative industries sector plan are delivered in the Solent Hampshire and EM3 LEP areas.

2.5.2 Support for Freelancers, Mid-Career Professionals, and industry entrants

More than half the Film and AV workforce work as freelancers or on short term contracts. Many others work for micro businesses with no formal inhouse training. A large proportion of the sector workforce therefore need to take ownership for their own CPD and training.

2.5.2.1 Establishing a consistent approach across the London Cluster and Surrounding area -

LSIPs serving London and surrounding areas should work together to coordinate and promote an accessible, transparent, and diverse film skills offer.

- **The London and South-East Film Cluster Skills Forum** - Surrey Hampshire and Solent LSIPs should support the formation of a London Cluster Film Skills forum. This would engage other LSIPs serving the London Cluster. This might be made up the chairs of the film skills partnership established by each LSIPs.
- **Skills Passports and Occupational Standards** - Skills forum partners should work together to support the proposal in the Industry Strategy sector plan for the introduction of skills passports. Partners should also work together to support the adoption of the screen skills occupational standards.
- **Development of a Diverse and Affordable Offer of Modular Short Courses to Underpin Occupational standards** - Partners should work together to ensure that at a local level, a core set of modular courses funded via the skills levy (as proposed in the Governments sector plan) are available to enable freelancers and professionals to demonstrate competence in relation to the occupational standards. Modular courses should also be used to break down inertia, so it is easier for craft professionals to flow into the sector.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.2.1 Establishing a consistent approach across the London Cluster and Surrounding area – (cont)

Partners should identify centres with specialist expertise such as the National Film and Television School and the Academy for Contemporary music who could be signposted to professionals anywhere requiring training relating to narrow specialisms.

- **Common Platform Advertising Training Across the London and South-East Cluster** - Forum partners should work together to establish a common platform, so that professionals working in London and South East have a single access point to find out about training within the areas serving the London Cluster.
- **Break Down Geographical Barriers Relating to Access to Training** - In some areas people wishing to attend bootcamps and other training need to live in the area where the training is delivered. Freelancers do not observe geographic boundaries. Partners should therefore seek to break down these barriers so that the industry workforce can access the widest diversity of training regardless of location.

2.5.2.2 Bootcamps and Modular Training

Bootcamps have proved a popular and effective way to support freelancers and entrance into the industry. The industry strategy identifies that funding will also become available to support modular short courses. LSIPs should seek to encourage:

- The delivery of a diversity of bootcamps key priorities might include:
 - ❖ Supporting entry into the industry e.g., Runners and Production Assistants.
 - ❖ Development of production, freelancing and self-promotion skills.
 - ❖ Providing access and training on industry standard equipment and software.
- Support Initiatives such as SetReady which provides industry entrants training and opportunities to work on set as location assistants. SetReady is an initiative developed by Film Fixer who have been commissioned to establish the Hampshire and Solent Film Office
- The delivery of a diversity of short modular courses might focus on:
 - ❖ Supporting the transition of craft professionals so they can work in the sector.
 - ❖ Consolidating and accrediting the skills of mid-level professionals so they are able to demonstrate fit with Screen Skills Occupational Standards.
 - ❖ Providing freelancers with access to affordable CPD.
- Supporting Colleges and Training Providers to access tutors with industry standard knowledge
 - ❖ Support train the trainer training to increase the pool of craft trainers.
 - ❖ To use the business network to access professionals who are prepared to act as trainers or mentors.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.3 Celebrating Creative Education Opening Pathways to Employment.

Further education provides the foundation for inclusive pathways into the creative sector. Many learners from disadvantaged communities, who have not found success at school are inspired by film related courses. A disproportionate number of students on creative courses are neurodivergent. Higher Education student outcomes data shows that creative courses have the highest employment outcomes of any discipline for students with disabilities.

However, for students who do not progress to University, the pathways to employment from FE into the sector are limited. Few apprenticeship options are available, college report challenges in finding T level placements and most employers have a culture of employing graduates rather than developing the talents of FE leavers.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.3.1 Celebrate Further Education as a Driver of Inclusion in the Film Sector (cont)

Further Education Colleges recruit cohorts of creative students who are disproportionately neurodivergent. (Freeman, 2025) (although often not diagnosed at school). Cohorts also disproportionately draw students from areas with high levels of deprivation. Frequently creative students in FE make progress they did not achieve at school.

Recommendations

- The story of what FE is achieving through the delivery of Film and Creative Industry courses needs to be communicated more effectively. Colleges need to make the case that they provide the foundation for policy to make the sector more inclusive. They also need to better evidence achievements such as GCSE passes in English and Maths which occur in parallel to delivery of film courses.
- Colleges need to better track what happens to students after they leave college. While some colleges report that around 50% of level 3 leavers progress to HE courses, (either delivered by Universities or FE colleges themselves), data on the outcomes experienced by the remaining 50% is hard to access.
- The leaders in skills policies need to recognise and address three key barriers to making the Film sector more inclusive.
 - ❖ Many FE leavers from groups which are underrepresented in the sector, are put off from progressing to HE, as they fear student debt and the insecure employment prospects creative graduates face. (This could be addressed by establishing better work-based learning and apprenticeship pathways)
 - ❖ People from underrepresented groups have less access to network connections who can provide work experience, live projects, and employment opportunities. They therefore find it harder to gain the accredited experience employers want to see evidenced, before offering employment or freelance opportunities. (This could be addressed by better brokerage of work placements and more after-sales service when courses are complete e.g. mentoring programmes)
 - ❖ Freelancing will disproportionately provide the entry route for people from underrepresented groups who wish to work in Film. The risk of a freelance career is much higher for someone from a low-income background than it is for someone with a more secure safety net. (This could be addressed by promoting safe freelance pathways, employers offering part-time paid internships and support to build a basic income. (This was the aim of Creative Growth Solent which sought to help freelancers to find a pathway to earn £20k , It is also the aim of the Ravensbourne SEEDS Programme).

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.3.2 Work Based Learning Works for Students but is hard to make them fit the needs of employers.

Work based learning, apprenticeships, flexi apprenticeships, T Level placements, structured paid internships and placements, provide some of the best learner friendly and potentially inclusive pathways to employment. Andy Burnham Mayor of Greater Manchester, speaking at The Southampton Skills Conference drew attention to the high number of T level Students who progress to employment often with the business offering a placement.

Many Employers however note their business is driven by short term project work , it is therefore difficult to offer job security over the 18-month duration of a level 3 apprenticeship. Most businesses in the sector employ less than 5 people, and therefore frequently consider supporting a T level placement to be too resource intensive.

Employers who do support work-based learning initiative or like millstream productions run inhouse talent development programmes which sometimes recruit from FE are delighted by the outcomes, and often will want to recruit additional talent through these pathways in subsequent years.

- **Grow work-based learning opportunities** - The LSIPS should work with colleges to grow the range of Creative and Film related T level courses, Apprenticeships and Flexi Apprenticeships as these are in high demand with students. Furthermore when providers like Artsworld have appropriate industry expertise and offer pastoral support, employers are frequently delighted by their experience of employing apprentices. The LSIPS should also support specialist organisations such as Artsworld which deliver a range of paid placement and internship programmes designed to open pathways to employment.
- **Intermediate Employers** - The LSIPS should support intermediate employer initiatives, which can act as a means of increasing the supply of work placements and live project experience , learning from the experience of the pilot brokered between Hampshire Chamber of commerce and Fareham College.
- **Build a coalition of willing employers prepared to support work-based learning** - The LSIPS should seek to build within the business partnership a coalition of employers willing to support or learn about work-based learning opportunities. Southern Creative Catalyst may provide a mechanism for starting this conversation.
- **Flexi Apprenticeships** - Applications for registration as a flexi apprenticeship agency are currently closed. They are however expected to re-open later in the year. The LSIPS should explore with FE and HE partners including Solent institute for technology the appetite to pilot a flexi apprenticeship programme. This might focus on the wider Createch sector, and a generic skill set e.g., project management and production skills which is relevant to the Screen Film and AV sector as well as a range of other creative and Createch businesses. In this way it may be possible to build a viable cohort.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations (cont.)

2.5.3.3 Education Providers Need to Equip Leavers to Meet the Needs of the Sector and the Reality That They Will Work on a Freelance Basis at Some Point During Their Career

The skills gaps in the sector primarily relate to craft skills, production skills and technical skills rather than explicitly creative skills. Too many courses attract students who have an expectation that they will gain a creative role rather than equipping them to fill actual gaps in the industry.

60% of the film workforce in the Surrey Hampshire and Solent LSIPs area freelance or work on short term contracts. It is therefore imperative that students leave university and college equipped to obtain work as a freelancer.

- **Enterprise Education** - Enterprise Education should be built into all FE and HE screen, film and audio-visual courses. Students should leave with a show reel, CV, and website. They should also know the basics of freelancing; including how to network, promote themselves, agree a contract, plan the delivery of a project, invoice, keep financial records and prepare information for a tax return.
- **Aftersales service** - After completing courses students will frequently need ongoing support, to ease the transition into employment. This may include mentoring programmes, support in developing freelance practice, affordable spaces within start up labs. Technology transfer, which enables former students to access equipment and technology can also play a significant role in opening pathways into the industry.
- **Careers advice** - Students need ongoing career advice, including support in accessing experience on live projects, paid internships and placements and freelance opportunities.

Appendices

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Appendix 1: Mapping the Film and Television Sector in Surrey and Solent LSIP Regions

Appendix 2: Listing of FE and HE Film Courses in the Hampshire Solent and Surrey Area

Appendix 3: Film Skills Needs in Surrey, Enterprise M3 and Solent LSIP Areas Full Report