sign_ Screen Industries Growth Network

THE TIME PROJECT

Understanding working time in the UK television industry

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with Share My Telly Job

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FOREWORD BY SHARE MY TELLY JOB

The Time Project came out of a desire to provide an answer to conversations that were happening simultaneously across the industry about inequalities in TV. As a group, we were all involved in thinking about TV in different ways – from a training perspective, as researchers, as production workers, as parents – but we were all frustrated by a lack of progression in the industry. So much talk (stats and reports too – hard evidence that the system was broken) about how to make the industry fairer and more inclusive, but so little result.

The Film and TV Charity's Looking Glass report in early 2020 had shown that the industry was in the grips of a mental health crisis, and linked this to excessive working hours among other factors. This needed further dissecting; we knew it wasn't as simple as 'we work too much' and wasn't just about our workplace culture. Grassroots organizations across TV and film were talking about issues affecting the workforce including bullying, and problems for disabled people and those with caring commitments. We felt that we had to examine the root causes more closely; otherwise we'd all just carry on reading the reports and blaming the culture and not making change.

Through these discussions we realised it was time that underpinned every barrier to equality we could think of. Last minute commissioning meant never enough time to recruit fairly, sustaining the informal, nepotistic networks so characteristic of TV. Ever-tightening schedules passing pressure on to workers to work longer and longer hours, threatening their mental and physical health and excluding anyone with caring responsibilities. Contracts normalising this overwork through buy-out clauses. Rates, especially for new entrants, when calculated hourly, barely making minimum wage and having the additional effect of excluding anyone who can't afford to work in TV. Stressed and stretched management resorting to bullying because they themselves are under intolerable pressure. Budgets, shrinking in real-terms, constantly going over as too-tight shoots meant pick-ups and fixes in the edit. Workers leaving. No training. No progression across the diversity characteristics due to all of the above.

We started discussing how to approach and measure time and the possibilities of understanding it as the conduit to cultural change. SMTJ's ethos is to create practical solutions to problems, and we wanted to make tangible change as we have through job-sharing. We developed a research plan and approached Dr Jon Swords, who runs the research strand at SIGN, who immediately saw the potential of the proposal. Outlandish developed the app; we ran a pilot. The full project went live in April 2021 and has been growing ever since.

The Time Project is a practical intervention that marries what we know with what we know must happen for television production to become a fairer, inclusive workplace. This is just the beginning for The Time Project and as it continues to grow and develop, it will keep delivering data on our three focus areas: skills, diversity and wellbeing. Our hope is that this information will be used by workers, production companies and broadcasters alike, as a collaborative tool to illuminate the pressure points that are being placed upon productions. It is data for equality and we hope you will join us in our work.

FOREWORD BY MARCUS RYDER, MBE

There are some memories that never leave you.

I first met my wife-to-be in 2002. A few months after we started dating, we went on a romantic weekend to Rome. As I sat across from her at a beautiful small picturesque restaurant my phone rang - it was work. I took the phone call and started discussing the latest edit of a programme I was overseeing.

My wife-to-be burst into tears.

At the time I was a young series producer, eager to progress my career, and throughout the short holiday I had been taking calls and emails from producers, researchers and my executive producer.

As someone who did not work in television my future wife was frustrated and could not understand how I could be working throughout this supposedly romantic break.

As someone who had only ever worked in television I was unable to understand how I couldn't work throughout this "romantic" break.

Having a career in television is a brilliant thing but all too often it carries a cost that we should not have to bear.

I have missed funerals, significant birthdays, and key family events.

There have been times when I have gone into the office with a toothbrush and a spare set of underwear, in the knowledge that I might be "pulling an all-nighter". And worse yet I have sometimes told people these things not as a sign of a bad work environment but as a badge of honour.

The truth is these types of working practices have adversely affected my close relationships and affected my mental health. And while I am proud to say that I have won several awards for the programmes and films I have been responsible for, the vast majority of the long hours I have worked have been to produce programmes that were literally forgotten the next day (or following month - if I am being kind).

The Time Project Report confirms what many of us already knew instinctively, that stories like mine and working these types of hours are not isolated cases, and far too many of us have difficulty separating home life and work life.

The report is full of shocking, although sadly not surprising, facts and figures from the number of hours people work on average - 10 hours per day - to the lack of breaks people are able to take - often ranging from just 30 minutes per day to none!

And while these statistics cover the industry as a whole, we should not fool ourselves that we are "all in this together". These working practices impact different people in different ways. They disproportionately impact people with caring responsibilities, pay gaps show that we are not all paid the same for the long hours we work, and people who live outside of London have a harder struggle finding their next job as they literally do not have the time to attend interviews.

This affects career progression and the diversity of who can work in the industry.

We cannot continue to work in this way. And most importantly we do not need to.

These working practices are the result of conscious choices made by people around budgets, delivery deadlines and management culture.

And while I can recount the long hours and bad working practices I have worked under, I have also been lucky enough to work on productions that did not cause me to work these types of hours, to give me decent breaks, and still produce award winning television shows.

As an industry we must do better. The bottom line is while we might use terms such as “long working hours” what much of this report is actually detailing is exploitation. And exploitation must never be normalised.

With the new information that this report has brought to light and the raft of constructive ways to tackle these problems I look forward to an industry that is world beating not just in the product it produces but how it treats everyone who works in it.

Marcus Ryder is the Head of External Consultancies at the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Working hours in the TV industry are well known for being long. The desire to get all the necessary shots 'in the can', to shoot all the necessary pages of the script and the need to achieve the vision of the creative team frequently requires the cast and crew to stay until things are done. The pressure increases with stretched budgets and squeezed production schedules imposed by broadcasters and streaming platforms.

This is the established way of working but it comes at a cost for workers. Long hours skew the work-life balance of workers, they are not healthy, restrict people with caring responsibilities, exacerbate existing health conditions and don't leave enough time for training and skills development. On top of the precarious nature of employment in the TV industry, these factors are contributing to massive equality, diversity and inclusion problems, a growing skills shortage and mental health crises.

Many organisations have sought to foster change, but their complaints about long hours are dismissed as a sign of a lack of commitment, not being up to the job or not being a team player. Others suggest it is OK to work long hours because TV workers aren't employed every week of the year so it evens out.

Undermining calls for change is a lack of usable evidence for long hours. Everyone knows people work long days, but experiences are treated as anecdotal without robust statistics. That's where this project comes in.

Almost 500 people shared details of 613 contracts they worked on over a six month period in 2021. In total 7200 days of work were recorded totalling almost 73,000 hours of work in the UK television industry.

We found that:

- On average, a TV worker works an extra 14 hours more than the general population, the equivalent of an extra two days per week. The average working hours are 10 hours per day, although hours vary widely with many workers putting in as much as 15-23 hours per day. The median break time is just 30 minutes, and 20% of entries include no breaks. Over 1200 hours of work was done by participants without a break.
- Working practices disproportionately affect those with childcare responsibilities. Respondents with children work on average 11 hours per day. Only 22% of participants in the dataset have children, compared with 38% of the general workforce (ONS, 2019).
- Women are paid less than men. The gender pay gap is 17.6% for those on day rates and 16.6% for those on weekly rates, with the greatest gender pay disparity occurring among women aged between 20-29, who earn 39% less than their male counterparts.
- There is lack of clarity over contracts, with only 55% of contracts actually stating the number of hours to be worked. This is partly due to the often informal nature of the industry with contracts agreed verbally, and this is compounded by short lead-in times

for production and poor recruitment practice. The overall result is instability and long hours.

- Where contracts state hours per day, 55% of entries showed longer than contracted hours were worked
- Those working in 'Craft and Tech' roles do the longest days. On average hair and make-up artists work 11.8 hour days, while electricians work an average of 11.3 hours. Men in their 30s and 40s working in Craft and Tech roles work 30 minutes less than their female counterparts, which reflects the long hours done by hair and make-up artists who tend to be women.
- Class background adversely affects work and pay. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have caring responsibilities outside of work. Respondents in their 30s and 40s who identify as being from low socio-economic backgrounds are on lower weekly rates compared to other groups, and this 'class pay gap' increases to 11% for people in their 40s.
- Geographies of work are skewed toward London and the South East, with 64% of all companies involved in film and television activities based in this region. This geographical spread reinforces inequality and leads to the exclusion of workers based elsewhere, particularly workers from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with caring responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The TV industry needs to reduce the hours people are expected to work beyond their contracted hours to bring it in line with the UK average.

The TV industry needs consistent contracting practice with clearly stated working hours.

Workers need clearer guidance on what should be included in contracts, what rates to expect and what working practices are unacceptable.

Commissioning organisations need to give sufficient time to production companies to allow them to undertake production without long working days.

Workers should be compensated for working overtime.

More time and resources are needed to allow workers to undertake training and develop their careers beyond 'learning on the job'.

More time is needed for a proper work-life balance that allow people:

- **time for caring responsibilities**
- **time to be physically and mentally healthy**
- **time for a life beyond work**

CONCLUSIONS

The key conclusions from this research are that the hours in TV are long: too long when compared to the rest of the economy. To repeat our key finding: on average, a TV worker works 14 hours more than the general population per week, the equivalent of an extra two days. Long working hours aren't moderated by breaks either, with the median break time at just 30 minutes, and 20% of entries in this dataset included no breaks.

These long hours include time when people aren't being paid, act as barriers to entry and reinforce exclusions, exploitation and discrimination in the TV industry. We can also identify pay gaps between workers which illustrate these issues: women are paid less than men and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are paid less than their counterparts.

Long hours also have a detrimental impact on time for caring responsibilities, for people's physical and mental health, for training opportunities and for a life beyond work. This is exacerbated when contracts are unclear and overtime is not paid. Things need to change.

An interesting find that is worth highlighting is that workers from groups already privileged in UK society – white people, men, people who aren't from lower socio-economic backgrounds – are working the longest hours (albeit only slightly in some cases). One might see this as a good thing as it could suggest people without such privileges are not being exploited, but there are a couple of important points to make here. First, privilege allows people to work longer - the people who can work longer hours seem to be working longer hours. Indeed, privilege allows you to work in the TV industry in the first place. Second, the impact of long hours can be mitigated by privilege (e.g. access to childcare, shorter commutes, not facing discrimination all lessen the impact of longer hours), but even so, in the medium to long term the effects will start to show. It is important, therefore, that long hours come down for everyone especially as it sets a tone of what is expected. It should not be expected that everyone needs to, or should work excessive hours. That is not to say people should be paid less, workers need to be compensated for their hours and not unpaid overtime which was common in this dataset.

An additional factor is worth considering: do longer hours reinforce privilege? Above we noted the importance of reputation and maintaining a presence in the industry to get work. One way to gain a reputation and maintain presence is to be around colleagues more and be known for working hard: working longer hours is a way to achieve this. Being around at the end of the day when people begin to socialise can help too. Being able to go to the pub after work or join colleagues for a meal helps forge new ties and reinforce existing ones. Being away on location means more time with colleagues to create bonds and build networks that will get you future work. Being available to take calls in the evening demonstrates a willingness to work. Although we don't have evidence to suggest this is a tactic for why some people are working longer hours in this dataset, it is something worth exploring further. Indeed, we need to better understand the driving forces for why there is a culture of long hours in TV. We know there

is exploitation and we know some people want to work longer hours, but it is less clear why this is. During this and other research we have heard various explanations which are caused by different factors. Some people blame commissioning organisations who don't plan ahead or make decisions quickly enough and therefore don't allow production companies sufficient time to make a programme. Others put the blame on production companies who, facing competition for work, undercut budgets which means people working fewer but longer days. We've heard crew blaming directors who overshoot 'just in case' they haven't got all the angles they need. Production office staff have highlighted that some people are forced to 'act up', working jobs they don't have experience in due to skills shortages and therefore it takes longer to achieve what they need. Some people have pointed to the long hours they work as a reason for long hours: people are tired and can't function as well as they might. Others work longer because they want to get ahead and can do so.

These and other reasons need to be understood. Moreover, the mechanisms through which they are reproduced and intersect with the mental health crises, exclusion, exploitation and discrimination rife in the TV industry must be unpacked to create lasting change. As the Time Project continues to collect data, more will be revealed about these factors. In the next section the SMTJ team outline potential ways forward to begin addressing the recommendations made here.

THE FUTURE FOR THE TIME PROJECT

The Time Project is about achieving parity. The data we are gathering is an attempt to show and then address the situations we know happen: the edit producer and editor working side by side into the early hours, yet only one of them gets paid for their overtime, or the shoots we've all been on, where some departments are paid for prep and wrap time and others aren't.
We started the project because we have all experienced exclusion in the industry, and there is currently huge momentum to make change. This is our ambition: to effect real, sustainable change.

A fair industry:

In the year we have been gathering the data referenced in this report, TV production has experienced a post-lockdown boom. Simultaneously, we have seen more and more awareness of workplace inequalities in the Film and TV industry. For example, we know that Production Managers' workload is increasing because of post-Brexit carnets and visas; Covid protocols and wellbeing accommodations - all of which are unavoidable and necessary, but without budgetary lines to allow for extra staff to help, or extra time to complete the work, PMs are being punitively over-burdened. Production has changed and this ambition is simple: that people are paid for the work they do. This means either sticking to contracted reasonable (i.e. not a buyout) hours or paying people overtime. As a tool for monitoring hours, The Time Project can enable employers to maintain fair working conditions for their workers based on the contracts they have been given.

An efficient industry:

But, we are told: how does the industry pay for this extra work? Instead, we say, how can we NOT pay people for their work? We know that the workforce is exhausted. The post-lockdown boom has meant people are working project-to-project without breaks. There isn't enough staff so skills gaps are opening up and as a result productions are being delayed, and costing more.

This though, is a chance for the industry to recalibrate to account for the needs of everyone. It may be counterintuitive, but by making schedules longer workers will be more efficient - it's well known that overwork is detrimental to productivity, not a driver for it. Production needs to be regulated and the boundary-less attitude of 'anything to get it done' consigned to history. Instead, employ more efficient ways of working. Flexible working retains experienced people, who make projects more efficient because money will not be wasted. Managers need to be more imaginative about what they can use to make their projects run well: start by asking your staff.

A sustainable industry:

An efficient, fair industry is a sustainable one. Film and TV production needs more people in it, yet the barriers of class, gender, race, ageism and ableism remain, sustained by the long-hours culture. The connected over-emphasis on a young workforce accelerates the loss of experienced workers, particularly women. How do we achieve and maintain a more diverse workforce?

Ambitions for The Time Project

Our ambition for The Time Project is that it becomes an industry-wide tool to address the issues above. The work referenced in this report is the start, not the finish. We want to address the barriers to parity maintained by the long hours culture. Punitive contracts need to be eradicated: no more buyouts, no more expectation of a 60-hour plus week, enforced breaks and where breaks are missed, penalty payments paid to everyone (already it is standard to pay No Lunch Break / NLB to crew) - by using the Time Project app managers can make sure their staff have the breaks they need. By showing how schedules are unrealistic, The Time Project can be used to argue for better scheduling and emergency allowances such as childcare when days run over.

Health and Safety can be made a priority: the continued diminution of crew sizes is directly linked to people working dangerously long hours - think of all the directors who drive home after a shoot. The Time Project can show the link.

Then, there are issues which need further investigation, for example better understanding the Gender Pay Gap: why do women work longer hours for less pay from the start of their careers?

There needs, however, to be a mutual responsibility. While companies must take responsibility for the welfare of their workers, staff must also look out for each other by being transparent about rates and not knowingly undercutting. Insist that the welfare of colleagues is a collective responsibility. Don't sign or crew up on buyouts. There has to be a conversation about reasonable adjustments, based on an understanding of the mutual and specific needs of any single project. Flexibility is a conversation that can be an accommodation for both employers and workers. Not just about 'flexible working' but employing flexible attitudes to the way we work.

The Way Forward: Improving the industry is a job for us all

Using The Time Project will improve transparency and make the industry fairer for everyone working within it. By showing the reality of working in Film and TV through hours and rates data - whether it's Runners being first in, last out and worst paid or men being paid more than women because 'that's what happens' - employers can work towards a fairer, more realistic, efficient and sustainable way of making Film and TV. Everyone can lead by example, but here are some key points to build into practice:

What you can do 1: Employers

- Do not use 'buyout' contracts. People cannot and should not be expected to work an unlimited number of hours and a normal working week should not routinely exceed 40 hours.
- Monitor working hours and breaks using The Time Project
- Communicate about and budget for reasonable adjustments (whether childcare, travel days, flexible working, exceptional long days)

What you can do 2: Broadcasters and Studios

- Allow adequate pre-production scheduling
- Tariffs need to include lines for newer practices around Covid, well-being and post-Brexit travel changes
- Use The Time Project to understand where budgets and schedules are not allowing time to produce your shows in a safe or sustainable way

What you can do 3: Workers

- Use The Time Project to record your hours and rates
- Join Bectu
- Look out for each other, talk about rates and keep reporting bad practice

Sign up to **The Time Project** at www.thetimeproject.co.uk

Employers interested in finding out more about how TTP can benefit your productions, please email time@smtj.tv

Acknowledgements

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About SIGN

The Screen Industries Growth Network (SIGN) is a unique, business-facing initiative supporting the TV, film and games industries in Yorkshire and the Humber. SIGN aims to make this region the UK's centre for digital creativity, and a model of diverse and inclusive activity. In order to do this, SIGN connects companies, support agencies and universities through a programme of training, business development, research and evaluation.

SIGN is a £6.4M project, starting in Summer 2020, and funded by Research England, the University of York, and its partners. The University of York leads the initiative, working with Screen Yorkshire and eight other Yorkshire universities. An extensive network of collaboration ensures that SIGN is equipped to deliver maximum impact across the region.

About Share My Telly Job

SMTJ (sharemytellyjob.com) was founded by four experienced television professionals to promote practical solutions to hiring and, crucially, retaining experienced, diverse industry talent. We provide tangible support to help all TV and Film workers achieve a better work-life balance so they may continue to thrive in an industry they have dedicated their working lives to.

SMTJ is a Community Interest Company and as such all the profits generated from our work are reinvested to enable us to deliver our social mission to create a more sustainable, inclusive and innovative screen industry.

SMTJ believes that the more diverse the people involved in making TV and Film are, the more enriched the stories we tell on screen will be.

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