

BURSARIES SCHEME

RESEARCH REPORT

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Screen Industries Growth Network

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.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Working within the screen industries can be a rewarding and innovative experience. Yet for many it can prove challenging, particularly for those who are currently underrepresented in the screen industries. Workplace surveys indicate a significant lack of diversity in the screen industry. Women, non-binary and trans individuals, people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, and people from low-income households share accounts of unfair, discriminatory behaviour and negative experiences whilst seeking employment, or working within the industry.

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connecting companies, support agencies and universities through a programme of training, business development, research and development. Funded by Research England Development Fund, SIGN is based at the University of York.

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SIGN Bursaries scheme

Following proposals by previous EDI lead, Professor Beth Johnson, a bursary scheme was developed. The scheme forms a key part of SIGN’s commitment to supporting the industry and as a means to support individuals looking to break into, or advance within, the screen industries. In particular, it sought to address barriers faced by individuals living within the Yorkshire and Humber area who identified as being within one of the key underrepresented

groups. Two rounds of the bursary were awarded in 2022. In total 115 applications were received, 83 were awarded and 72 were claimed across the two rounds. A further 250 bursaries were awarded in the form of funds for training courses and network membership, but this report is concentrating specifically on the two rounds of financial bursaries. Below are the figures for applications received across both rounds.

Gender	Round One	Round Two	Total
Female	33	18	51
Male	14	12	26
Non-Binary	2	3	5
Other/ Undisclosed		1	1

TABLE 1. Gender

Ethnicity	Round One	Round Two	Total
Asian/ Asian British	4	1	5
Black British	4	2	6
Chinese	1		1
Mixed	5	1	6
White British	23	25	48
White (Other)	3	3	6
Other/ Undisclosed	2		2

TABLE 2. Ethnicity

Level	Round One	Round Two	Total
Entry – very new	25	25	50
Early < 2 years	13	9	22
Experienced > 5 years	9	3	12
Expert > 10 years	2	2	4

TABLE 3. Years in industry

Age	Round One	Round Two	Total
18-24	17	9	26
25-34	15	10	25
35-44	11	9	20
45-54	4	4	8
55+	2	2	4

TABLE 4. Age

Disability	Round One	Round Two	Total
Yes	13	12	25
No	30	18	48
Other/ Undisclosed	6	4	10

TABLE 5. Disability

Education	Round One	Round Two	Total
State School	40	27	67
State School (selective on the grounds of faith or academic achievement)	3	6	9
Educated outside of UK	4	5	9
Fee paying school without bursary	1	1	2
Fee paying school with bursary	1		1

TABLE 6. Education

Sexuality	Round One	Round Two	Total
Heterosexual	25	12	37
Lesbian or gay	6	6	12
Bisexual	8	10	18
Other/ Undisclosed	10	6	16

TABLE 7. Sexuality

The categories for award were accessing training/coaching, accommodation, caring needs, driving lessons/tests, equipment and software, subsistence and travel. The amount claimed per category can be found in Figure 1.

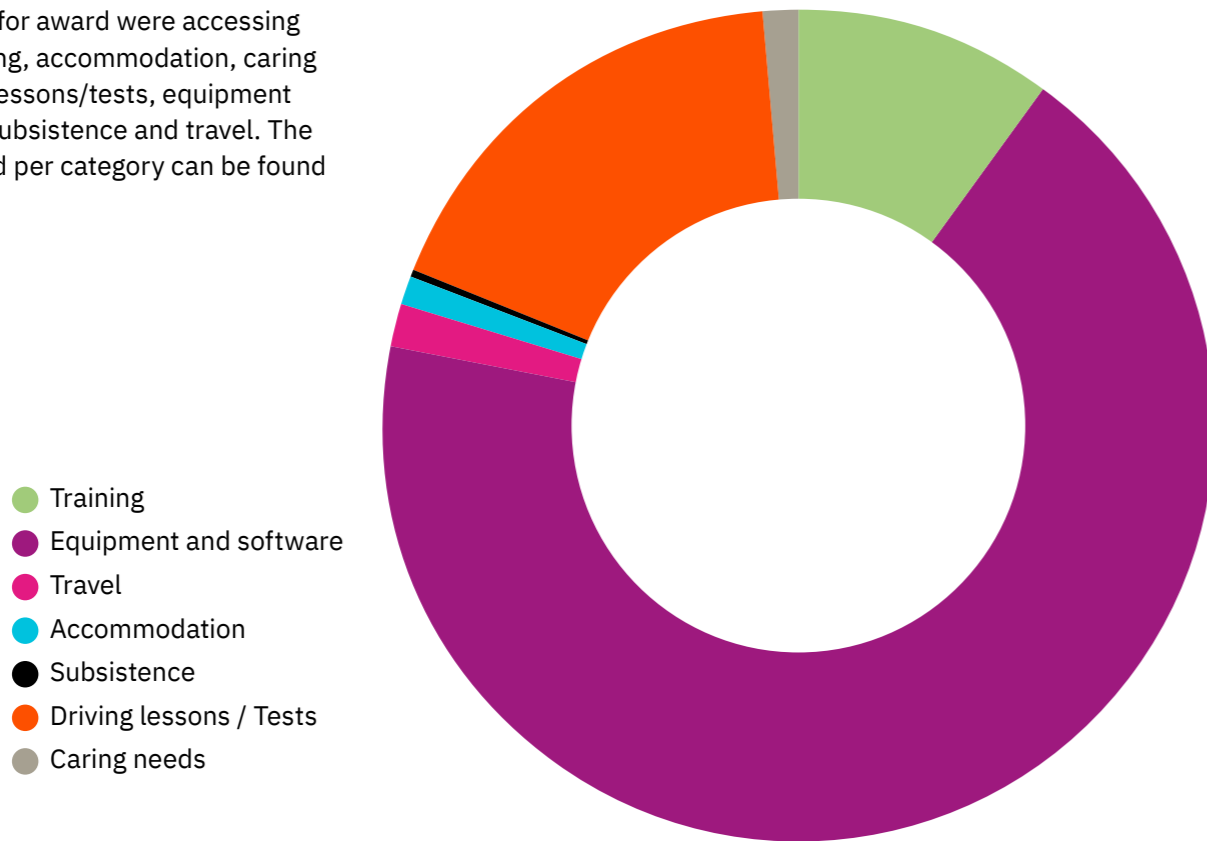


FIGURE 1. Proportion of claims per category.

Financial barriers are a growing concern and can limit opportunities for many seeking entry or looking to advance within the industry. In a competitive environment, creative portfolios help individuals to secure employment or the next project. While some people have access to industry standard software and equipment during their degree programme, educational opportunities are not available to all. Educational qualifications, training and professional experience have become minimum requirements. Freelancers and SMEs working within the industry also face expectations to attend training programs whilst keeping up to date with new and advancing technologies.

Poor public transport links and spiralling travel costs present a major barrier for people located in the region, particularly when large numbers of roles and training opportunities are based in London. Those who are unable to travel with ease are particularly disadvantaged. Moreover, driving

lessons are expensive and not accessible to all; yet, the ability to drive is highly desirable for work in the industry. For further professional development, access to training opportunities is vital. In-person training is particularly beneficial as it offers invaluable networking opportunities. However, the costs attached to attending such training limit accessibility. Further costs can include accommodation fees, subsistence and sourcing additional childcare.

The SIGN bursary scheme was set up to assist individuals experiencing these challenges. In this report we share insights from awardees on how the bursary has come into use.

Financial barriers are a growing concern and can limit opportunities for many seeking entry or looking to advance within the industry.

2. METHODS

What we did

On receiving the award, people were asked to complete an evaluation form responding to questions listed in Table 8.

Tell us about the training or employment activity that your bursary award related to.
Please detail how you spent the bursary award
Tell us how the bursary has enabled you to further your career in the screen industries
Relating to the question directly above – did the outcome of the bursary meet or exceed your expectations. If so, how?
Overall, how well did the bursary meet your needs

TABLE 8. Evaluation questions

Using the feedback from the evaluation forms, we identified responses where further information would be beneficial, for example, responses that suggested impact. We were interested in experiences where the bursary had been sufficient, to hear from those who indicated that the bursary did not fully meet their needs, and from those whose needs were not met at all. Those who had not been able to use their bursary due to circumstances such as driving lessons being unavailable were also considered.

To follow this up, a total of 12 individuals from diverse personal and professional backgrounds were interviewed across both bursary rounds. Their selection was based on a number of factors including: claim use, level of seniority (i.e. entry to business owner), and responses in the initial evaluation form that would benefit from further investigation, for example, did

...a total of 12 individuals from diverse personal and professional backgrounds were interviewed across both bursary rounds.

the training programme they attended lead to progression.

A set of generic questions were developed and further tailored to the specifics of each bursary recipient. The questions were designed to evaluate the impact that the bursary had on a personal and professional level.

This included questions regarding career aspirations before the award, how the award impacted personal or professional development and subsequent future aspirations.

The interviews took place in June and July 2023. At the point of interview, some had just completed their training programme when others had completed the training a few months back. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Common themes

Overall, the interviews indicated a significant need for financial support to enter the industry, or to progress therein.

Access to otherwise inaccessible industry standard software, equipment and training were reported to assist with the establishment of SMEs and obtaining industry entry requirements. The bursary was used to support professional development of those already in the industry with industry standard hardware

and software, opening up a larger pool of potential clients and stakeholders, obtaining a driving license making it more possible to accept higher stakes job roles, and supportive training opportunities that enabled further development.

The interviews provided detailed accounts on the impact of the bursary, summarised in table 9, emphasising how the bursary helped to progress their skills and development, enabled them to establish a company or project, and/or on a more personal level, increased their confidence, or helped finance care needs. These are now discussed in turn.

Theme	Description
Development and Progression	The assistance in meeting entry level requirements for applications, skill development and progression within the industry: portfolios, CV's, job applications, networking.
Innovation	The establishment of an SME, projects or innovative ideas. Recipients having developed a drive and interest in furthering support for underrepresented individuals entering, or working within, the industry.
Personal Growth and/or Assistance	Confidence in self, skill sets and abilities. Support with care duties. Mentoring and coaching.

TABLE 9. Overarching themes



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Progression and Development

The screen industries need creative, diverse and unique talent to develop authentic and artistic content. However, the tools for creatives to explore, develop and showcase their skills can be unaffordable for a large number of individuals.

The SIGN bursary was accessed by a diverse pool of professionals to fund access to industry standard software, equipment, training, driving lessons and tests. This resulted in the development of their skills and knowledge, and progression within the industry by being able to meet travel requirements, retraining, or by accessing industry standard equipment.

Innovation

Industry professionals who create, develop and establish products, services and companies contribute towards industry growth.

The SIGN bursary scheme assisted screen industry professionals with a variety of experience and roles. A number of the professionals used their claim to pay for coaching programmes which gave them access to training opportunities, support networks and one-on-one mentorship. The bursary also helped for retraining or new skill development opportunities and to purchase software with collaboration features. A significant number of participants started SMEs, progressed in their professional practice due to high-specification equipment and software, and pitched to major broadcasters or accepted high-end roles in the industry.

The result of the bursary has also led to recipients seeking further involvement in supporting underrepresented voices or creatives in the industry.

Personal

A number of people used the bursary to purchase industry standard software. One individual shared how investors and clients did not take them seriously for using open source software. The awardee used the bursary to purchase industry standard software which improved how their skills and abilities were perceived by investors and clients.

One awardee shared how they had been turned down for jobs because they did not have access to advanced equipment. They purchased the equipment with their bursary and now feel confident in their abilities and have been successful pitching to clients.

To illustrate diverse experiences and use of the bursaries, three case studies are featured before concluding.

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3. CASE STUDIES

Claire's Story

I was finding myself burnt out, needing a bit of direction and a bit of mental support.

Theme	
Progression and Development	Training, administrative duties with running a business (bids, funding applications, and commissions)
Innovation	Funding applications, commissions, networking, stepping back into the industry following personal time away, working with new technologies.
Personal	Coaching, impact of personal commitments, confidence in their authentic self (imposter syndrome and identity)
Claimed in round	1 & 2

TABLE 10. Claire

As a black mixed-race woman from a working class family, Claire experienced a range of challenges in running a business within the screen industries. Following COVID-19 and working long hours, Claire reached a breaking point and ended up in burnout.

I was finding myself burnt out, needing a bit of direction and a bit of mental support.

Claire used the bursary to cover the fees of a mentoring programme to help work through the burnout and to 'figure a few things out'. The programme was developed for professionals like Claire and involves one-on-one support, access to workshops and weekly support sessions for members. She explained:

When you work digitally or from home, it can be quite isolating at times, and you can forget that other people are in the same boat as yourself, especially being a self-employed person working to commissions, and having to write funding applications all the time, you forget that you're not the only one. There are other people out there that are doing the same thing, and they can offer advice.

Prior to the programme, Claire experienced self doubt, fuelled by encounters when she felt that her skills and abilities were questioned. Claire explained:

Sometimes they just look at you like you don't know what you're doing. But you do know what you're doing.

The programme included a session on imposter syndrome, providing a range of tools for Claire to use in future situations.

As a black mixed-race woman from a working-class family, you constantly think – you're constantly living in imposter syndrome. It doesn't really matter what you've achieved, that never goes away. Like you said, it's nice to have support and nice to have people to talk to, to remind you that you're not alone.

Recently, due to personal circumstances, Claire took a career break. She had to find a way to put her work commitments on halt temporarily, but could not disclose why. This led to her experiencing feelings of guilt, rejected funding applications and disappointed work connections from projects she withdrew from before completion.

It's the guilt of having to bow out of those work commitments, and having the time away, and not having the discourse with the people that you were working with, and not being able to tell them, oh, well, this is what's happening now, this is what's happening now. Just having to drop everything and be away, it's the guilt.

When returning to work after a long period of absence, Claire had to network connections, apply for funding and projects. She felt as if she was back to square one. During this time, she became acutely aware of how much support is needed for professionals returning to work, especially business owners.

I think anything that I would suggest would definitely be due to – be down to supporting and running your own business. Even little things like the application funding – funding application writing.

Where are they now?

Claire was unable to fully engage with the programme. She feels that an extended period of access would be beneficial, although she would struggle to finance it herself. Claire has been regaining her momentum; applying for events and future projects, including work with emerging XR technologies, applying for funding and reestablishing connections.

Noah's story

Then once I'd received the bursary and afterwards, I think it gave me permission and gave me the opportunity to really breathe.

Theme	
Progression and Development	Training qualification, furthered skill development and software knowledge through access and exploration
Innovation	Collaboration
Personal	Confidence in skills reflected in the use of industry standard software, confidence gained through the attainment of a training qualification
Claimed in round	1 & 2

TABLE 11. Noah

Noah, a managing director of a production company, experienced financial and socioeconomic barriers whilst navigating employment in the screen industries. He did not attend further education, therefore he did not have the opportunity to access educational resources. This put him at a disadvantage because he needed to develop his skills and create a portfolio to begin applying for work in the industry. As a result, prior to the bursary, Noah had to fund the software from his income and the cost of the subscription put him instantly in deficit. This left him feeling 'panicky' and 'concerned' about his income 'because the software is unbelievably expensive'.

Then once I'd received the bursary and afterwards, I think it gave me permission and gave me the opportunity to really breathe.

Noah used the bursary to access training and to purchase software, hardware, and transportation.

There were multiple benefits for Noah once he had access to the industry standard software. He was able to explore and learn the software with ease knowing that the bursary covered the subscription fees whilst building on his portfolio. It gave him the opportunity to collaborate using built-in features that support collaboration.

Furthermore, it helped improve his professional image with stakeholders, clients and major broadcasters.

Speaking with other people who did go to university, they might get access to the Creative Cloud, all these softwares, for free as part of their course, so they're already at that level by the time they graduate. For me, who's worked constantly during that time, and just gone completely the other path of just working and trying to get a step up, it's like, yes, there is that expectation of, well, all these other graduates have it, why don't you?

Noah used part of his bursary award to fund a diploma studying new technologies. This was an invaluable experience for him, because it allowed him to access education without it having an impact on his living expenses. Being able to study for his diploma has so far been an 'amazing' and 'fantastic' experience.

I know what to expect, or have my own expectations of what it could be, but actually it's a really big risk of spending... So having it be from the bursary really eliminates the risk for me.

Where are they now?

Since receiving the bursary Noah has been networking and collaborating with major broadcasters- Channel 4 and Netflix. The access to industry standard software and equipment has improved Noah's professional image and skillset.

In terms of career aspirations, it's just continuing on working in the film industry, predominantly as a writer and director, and just seeing where it takes me, and continuing to work on stuff and stories that are untold, that are under-represented, and hopefully, that comes out from this training that I'm doing at the moment as well, in telling stories that are actually not particularly explored, and working with young people who are systematically excluded, as well. So I think that's really important.

Rose's Story

Theme	
Progression and Development	Accessing/driving to jobs outside of Yorkshire and Humber since passing the driving test.
Innovation	Driving has allowed Rose to become a full time freelancer.
Personal	Having enough time whilst learning to drive without feeling pressured to learn quickly, confidence in abilities from professional success.
Claimed in round	2

TABLE 12. Rose

Rose moved from Canada and began studying in the UK, she has since began working as a photographer in the screen industry. Rose used her bursary to fund driving lessons and her test. Without a

driving license, Rose had to turn down job opportunities in the past, which she found upsetting and disheartening.

Rose faces unrealistic expectations that she

has to navigate as a freelancer in the industry. For example, she was contacted and asked to make it to set the following morning, which in itself is an unfair expectation. Without a car, the journey would take Rose around two hours by public transport. Sometimes she would be required to carry large pieces of kit to the set too, which proved impossible without access to a car.

I can't go there and just drop everything unless I've got someone who can support me.

Living with a chronic illness and maintaining a healthy work life balance proved challenging financially. Rose wanted to become a freelancer full time but needed access to her own vehicle. The cost of driving lessons and a test was not affordable, so she was unable to access employment in the industry.

I still have a couple of chronic illnesses, including chronic depression. So at the time it was quite bad and I was just learning how to manage work and work-life balance and it was impossible to get a full-time job, before these lessons.

Learning to drive can be a long, challenging and exhausting process. The bursary meant she had longer to learn because she was not restricted to a small number of hours, which she would have been if she had to fund the lessons from her income. Due to the long waiting lists for driving tests in the UK, Rose was relieved to have enough funding to pay for lessons whilst waiting for a test place to become available.

You don't want to forget what you've learnt so you have to keep paying for more lessons in between to sort of maintain that knowledge and skills.

Where are they now?

Within a month of passing the test, Rose was offered a role that required extensive traveling.

Without the bursary, I wouldn't have done it then, I wouldn't have gotten the job.

Rose is a prime example of how the bursary has given access to underrepresented professionals in the screen industries. Before the bursary, Rose was turning down good opportunities because she was unable to drive; a month after passing her test she began landing high profile roles. She has to drive down South for the majority of her roles, as there are not many available in the North. Rose believes that without her license, she would not be working as a freelancer in the screen industries at this moment in time. What's more, Rose has gone from turning down good opportunities to choosing what roles she wants to pursue.

It was a great experience and it definitely helped my career a lot.

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4. SUMMARY

When bursaries help

Bursary schemes are an important means of support for screen industry professionals from underrepresented backgrounds. They provide financial assistance to a wide range of industry requirements that are not readily available to everyone.

The bursary achieved more than providing money. It provided different support to a diverse group of individuals accessing and progressing within the industry. It offered breathing space and relief where this was needed, and gave professionals the means to develop themselves and their professional aspirations. One of the awardees shared:

Without it, I don't know if I'd be where I am today, a year later, living on my freelancing full-time. I don't think I would be there, to be honest

Bursary schemes provide professionals from a low-income household access to educational and training opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. One awardee explained how the access to training impacted them:

I didn't go to university. I live on a council estate...having to find that expense myself has been quite a struggle, but this has been, as I say, it's been lifechanging to have the access to it.

When training opportunities are unaffordable, it prevents professionals from developing their current skills, or from retraining and moving from one role to another. One awardee shared how the bursary was used to fund a training opportunity which has contributed to them retraining:

The bursary made a big difference...It meant I could do the course.

Starting a career in the screen industries can be a difficult experience for professionals who have a disability. Training opportunities are an invaluable resource for professional development by providing knowledge and confidence, but can be unaffordable and inaccessible. One awardee shared how:

SIGN has been an incredibly invaluable resource for me, not only as an autistic and disabled creative but also just in general when it comes to learning as much as possible at the start of my screen career.

When more help is needed

The bursary scheme has assisted people working within the screen industries. However, in some instances further financial assistance is required. The high expectations of industry standard equipment, travel expenses and training requires significant funds for an individual to succeed. When a variety of professional requirements and developmental needs occur, it can be difficult trying to cover the costs. Creatives in the industry are expected to cover high, and sometimes, multiple costs.

One awardee used the SIGN bursary to fund driving lessons and a test. Although they still needed to access another bursary from a different provider for equipment. This awardee shared:

It wasn't just the SIGN Bursary, I also had a bursary from ScreenSkills at one point for kit, because I couldn't afford to buy a camera that is needed for the jobs that I did. So yes, and I'm nowhere near a good

financial position right now, don't get me wrong, but at least I'm doing what I love and my career is progressing in the right direction which is, well, yes, I don't have words to describe it, I never thought I'd get to this point, honestly, especially from the background I come from.

While financial support makes the industry more accessible to professionals from an underrepresented background, a number of awardees at different professional levels shared how they needed support and advice. In fact, imposter syndrome was discussed by many, suggesting a significant need for support for people at different career stages.

Similarly, the pressure to place work commitments above your own health is another unfair expectation that is faced by many industry professionals. There is a concern regarding the mental health of industry professionals. This was demonstrated in a survey that identified 87% of respondents having experienced a mental health problem, and subsequently identified two thirds of TV and film workers having experienced depression (2020, Wilkes).



5. CONCLUSION

The industry relies on creativity, yet the price of creativity is high. To this extent, talented individuals are excluded and it creates an unbalanced working environment. Even when professionals gain access into the industry, they can continue to face unfair barriers which prevent them from progressing and advancing.

This is why bursary schemes, such as the one provided by SIGN, are a vital tool that needs to exist so that professionals from all levels can access the equipment, training, and travel expenses required. Underrepresented voices especially need to be supported because they face barriers that impact their ability to exist and thrive within the industry. Bursary schemes are an effective way to support a more balanced, diverse and fair working environment.

Mental health is a growing concern in the industry. Many of the individual testimonials received for this research project indicate we need to do more to address the imbalance between work and life. Bursary schemes can help address financial barriers for a reasonable industry acquired expenses, such as equipment and training. However to assist in the dismantling of the barriers faced by unrepresented individuals in the industry, unfair expectations need to be addressed.

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