

CHECKLIST TO HELP MAKE FLEXIBLE WORKING WORK IN FILM AND TELEVISION





timewise

Timewise is a social enterprise with commercial expertise and a clear goal: to make flexible working work for everyone.

Through our work with employers, candidates, policymakers, labour market influencers and funders, we're creating stronger, more inclusive workplaces, powered by flexible working.

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BECTU VISION

BECTU Vision deliver short courses and a drama training programme of activity to support the skills development of crew in Scotland. BECTU Vision is supported by Screen Scotland, BBC and Scottish Union Learning in partnership with Bectu.

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SCREEN SCOTLAND
SGRIN ALBA

BBC





INTRODUCTION

In 2022 BECTU Vision and Timewise came together to explore how to improve opportunities for flexible working within scripted drama productions in Scotland. Over a six-month period, commissioned by Screen Scotland, we interviewed a range of industry experts and production crew working on four different productions.

The goal was to scope the extent to which working patterns could be adapted to reduce long hours, enhance health and wellbeing for individuals, and enable productions to attract and retain skilled and experienced talent.

There is no getting away from the fact that the biggest challenge to flexible working in film and television is the length of the standard 11-hour day. The majority of crew

and producers involved in our research were of the belief that fundamentally tackling this is the way to change the industry, increase retention and minimise burn out.

Piloting a model for a shorter working day is therefore the key recommendation of our research report, full details of which can be found in [How to make flexible working work within the film and television industry](#).

In the meantime, production can look at ways to introduce flexibility to some roles within the current working model. In this guide we highlight why it is important for production teams and Heads of Department to consider flexible working options for their crew, and provide a checklist of practical actions they can take when crewing up.

THE CASE FOR ACTION ON FLEXIBLE WORKING

The long hours' culture in film and television is known to cause problems for mental health and wellbeing, with 86% of people in film and television experiencing mental ill-health. The drain of skilled and experienced women in mid-career is also familiar to all, as the long and unpredictable hours are incompatible with raising a family. And the recent rapid growth of the industry is heaping on additional pressure, leading to acute skills shortages with crew working back to back on productions.

Our research highlighted a high level of demand for flexible working, the lack of which may contribute to people quitting the industry. The key reasons for crew wishing to work flexibly are:

- Having childcare or other caring responsibilities
- Wanting to reduce the pressure of the job and achieve a better work-life balance
- Moving into later career and feeling they can no longer sustain the long working days.

By making practical changes to enable flexible working for your production you can:

- Retain talent by making it feasible for those intending to leave the industry to remain
- Attract new talent by making your production the most attractive one to work on for those who want greater flexibility
- Improve the health, wellbeing, and work-life balance of your crew by giving them a greater sense of control over their working patterns.

“ You can't have kids and stay. **FACT.** ”

“ People don't retire they just disappear. They don't come back to a production... There is no ramp down, no slow exit. You are either there or you're not. ”

“ You'd keep me in this industry longer if I could scale down my days. I'm not ready to leave but I can't keep going like this. ”

“ I have a line producer who is a new mum working with me doing a cast contracting role. It's significantly below her capability, but it's the only way she can work flexibly and keep one toe in the industry. ”



CHECKLIST OF TIPS

The following checklist can help when thinking about how you crew up, and how your crew can work more flexibly without impacting production.

We encourage all Heads of Department to read this checklist to help evaluate where flexible working could be possible in relation to their own department. An assessment at the start of each production, and an openness to discussion about flexible working, can help you secure and retain talent.

FLEXIBLE JOB DESIGN – WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

- When considering what types of flexibility you can offer, you need to assess this department by department and role by role.
- You need to start having the right conversations, and asking the right questions, at the earliest stage possible in pre-production.
- The questions opposite on 'where, when, how much' will help you to cover the essential points.



WHAT IS 'FLEXIBLE WORKING'?

Flexible working means different things to different people. At Timewise we use the term to describe a way of working where the individual has some autonomy and control over where, when, and how much they work.



Where
Work from home



When
Flexible hours



How much
Part-time, job share, shorter day



WHERE does the work need to happen, and does it need to be face to face?

- ✓ Where will the majority of the department work take place?
- ✓ How does this vary across the production schedule? For example, pre- and post-production may lend themselves best to remote working.
- ✓ What non-location based tasks could be done remotely, and could a crew member work from home if they plan ahead to schedule these tasks for a particular part of the day or week?
- ✓ Does the team have the right equipment to work remotely?
- ✓ Do they have a quiet workspace, free from distractions?
- ✓ Do they have reliable internet connection and phone signal?
- ✓ What else, if anything, could the business or production provide to help people work more effectively from home?

WHEN does the role holder need to be available?

In some roles the work required can be delivered in a different working hours pattern than what is considered standard. This can help crew members who have specific restraints on their times due to external circumstances.

- ✓ Can working patterns be flexed to allow people to work at different times of the day or week? For example, is the crew needed throughout the length of the production day, or can you block their activity to allow them to work from call until lunch or from lunch until wrap?
- ✓ Are you able to consider staggered start and end times in the context of semi-continuous and non-continuous hours for the department?
- ✓ What impact would this have on the wider team in terms of response times?
- ✓ Are there periods in pre- and post-production where you can be more open to activities being scheduled at different times across the week?
- ✓ Flexible hours can be on an ad hoc basis or as a fixed arrangement. Consider how often you need to review and reassess the needs of your department.
- ✓ What turnaround do you expect on tasks and can you be explicit when setting work, to give crew more control over when they do the work?
- ✓ If you have a member of the team working flexibly and they are unavailable at certain times, can you substitute with another member of the team, or can you employ someone on a part-time basis to fill the gap?

HOW MUCH work does the role holder need to do?

There are many different ways to work less, including part-time arrangements of fewer or shorter days, which can sometimes be facilitated through job sharing or job splitting. Doing part-time well requires careful job design.

- ✓ Is it possible for a particular role to be undertaken in fewer hours?
- ✓ Are there points across a production where you could consider reduced hours, even if not for all of it?
- ✓ If you agree to a part-time arrangement, consider the whole team's workload. Are you able to redistribute key activities, in line with capacity? Is there capacity within the department to substitute for the job holder when they are not there?
- ✓ Could you utilise part of your dailies budget to facilitate a regular part-time member of staff? A crew member who is part of the production, supporting the department through the whole shoot, is often a stronger asset than dailies brought in as a late response to circumstances.
- ✓ Can the role be covered by two individuals, who can substitute for each other as a job share? Could this be considered across shifts within a day (ie morning / afternoon / evening slots), or with tasks shared as fixed blocks across the week or across the whole production schedule?
- ✓ If job-share is an option, consider efficient ways to ensure consistency in terms of handover time.
- ✓ Can the role be covered by two people splitting the tasks between them? A 'job split' is different from a job share; a junior team member works full time and a senior department member works reduced hours alongside them to support the knowledge gaps. No handover time is needed.
- ✓ With job splits, consider the benefits in terms of retaining older, more experienced talent.
- ✓ Finally, assess whether you could consider reducing the working day for your whole department. How feasible is this if considered against the wider production schedule?

MAKING IT WORK WITHIN YOUR BUDGET

Once you have considered what flexibility is possible, you will need to assess any impact on costs to make this work. For example, hiring additional dailies to backfill and substitute certain tasks, or budgeting for hand-over time for a job share.

It's worth considering what funding might be available through training budgets or grants, for example from Screen Scotland or Screen Skills.

COMMUNICATING YOUR PLANS

Once you are in a go-ahead situation, you will next need to communicate that you are open to flexible working, in order to attract the widest pool of potential talent. A few things to consider:

- Be transparent when you are building your crew, around the opportunities you can consider.
- Articulate this in any job vacancies or through networks you are using, so that crew seeking flexibility know it's available.
- Build trust from the crew by having these open negotiations at the start of the production, to consider what people need and how it can be done.

MAKING IT WORK AS A TEAM OR DEPARTMENT

The best way to consider flexible working is across a team, with consultation when changes are implemented. This can be challenging in film and TV, as each production will require a whole new crew. Longer running series can build good practices to ensure regular reviews and input from the crew, but even in a one-off drama it's important to be aware of the following considerations:

- When enabling flexible working within your department, whether on a formal or informal basis, you will need to get all individuals involved in the best ways to deliver the schedule whilst also supporting each other's working patterns and preferences.
- Once your team is in place, share everyone's preferred working patterns and discuss as a team how to make it work.
- Consider who may need to substitute for who across the production schedule.
- Discuss how to ensure your approach is consistent, so that no-one is unfairly disadvantaged by another crew member's flexibility.
- Have regular check-ins once in production, no matter how short, to understand where the pressure points are as a team, and invite solutions.
- Make time at the end of the production to review what has worked. Document this and look for opportunities to replicate it in future.



FURTHER RESOURCES

BECTU Vision guide to effective job shares:
<https://bectu.org.uk/bectu-vision-taketwo/>

Cinegirl magazine: <https://www.cinegirl.net/>

Cinemamas support and networking for mothers in the industry: <https://www.cinemamas.co.uk/>

Media Parents jobs board for working parents:
<https://www.mediaparents.co.uk/>

Raising Films guidance to creating inclusive productions: <https://www.raisingfilms.com/creating-inclusive-productions-resource/>

Screen Skills training and support for returners, with case studies: <https://www.screenskills.com/developing-your-career/returning-to-work/>

Share My Telly Job advice on recruiting job shares:
<https://www.sharemytellyjob.com/how-to-recruit-job-sharers/>

Whole Picture Toolkit with advice on managing mental health in production: <https://wholepicturetoolkit.org.uk/how-to-use-our-toolkit/#>

We hope this checklist has given you some tools and tips to help you when considering implementing greater flexible working.

