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# What can we do to help? Freelance survey

April 2020





# What can we do to help?

## Freelancer survey

### Summary of findings

Between 31 March and 9 April 2020, ScreenSkills conducted a short survey targeting the screen industry freelance community. The purpose of the survey was to shed light on how to effectively respond to the challenge generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, so that we can provide practitioners with the most useful support during these unprecedented times.

The findings suggest that there are at least two main priorities for the screen industry freelance community. The first is to respond to any immediate, vital needs such as financial and employment guidance, which are considered instrumental in keeping freelancers going. The second is to plan and be ready for the recovery phase, through upskilling and workforce development. Despite the tough short-term obstacles, freelancers in the screen industries are striving to keep themselves informed and connected and – where possible – to develop their skills.

This evidence is being used by ScreenSkills to support the freelance workforce in multiple ways across all parts of the screen industries – television, including unscripted, children’s and high-end, film and animation – and with investment from voluntary industry contributions to all the ScreenSkills Skills Funds as well as National Lottery funds awarded by the BFI as part of its Future Film Skills strategy and membership of the Indie Training Fund.

The survey findings clearly show that the range of sessions ScreenSkills began to organise as lockdown commenced resonated with the needs of freelancers who told the survey they wanted practical information on issues such as finance as well as masterclasses and other training opportunities such as in leadership. The programme already up and running has proved extremely popular and we will continue to develop it in weeks to come, tailored, where necessary, for particular demands in high-end, unscripted or children’s TV or film and animation.

### Methodology

A recent BFI study estimates that self-employed workers in the film and TV sectors account for 32% of this workforce, nearly double that of the UK working population as a whole (15%). This percentage further splits into PAYE freelancers (37%), sole trader/Schedule D freelancers (27%) and those who operate as one person companies (36%)<sup>1</sup>.

In light of the vital importance of freelancers in the sector, ScreenSkills thought it important to undertake a quick assessment of what can be practically done to support the sector. In line with ScreenSkills’ organisational remit of developing skills and supporting our workforce, the main question of the short questionnaire revolved around the best type of training, skills enhancement, advice, support for wellbeing and other activities that could help freelancers cope better in the current circumstances.

The questionnaire was distributed via ScreenSkills’ social media and newsletters and with support from partner bodies, as well as uploaded on the ScreenSkills’ website. The survey was completed

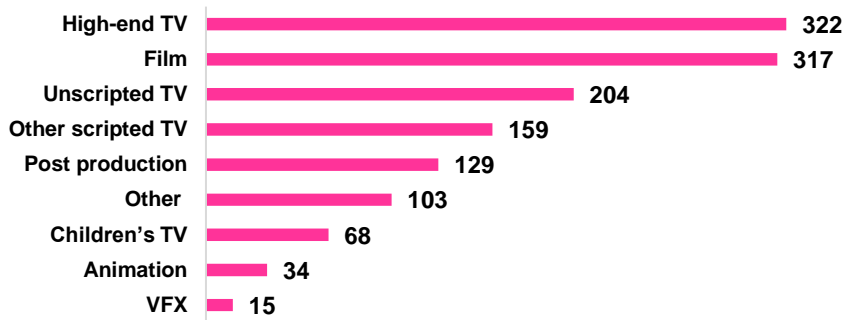
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<sup>1</sup> BFI (Forthcoming) COVID-19 Impact Report - Film and TV Sector Workforce Statistics

by 676 respondents. Given a total population of 211,000 workers in the screen industries<sup>2</sup>, our sample is on the whole representative of the screen industries workforce, with a confidence interval of 99% and a margin of error of 5%.

To determine the sample composition, respondents were asked to select the sectors they work in (Figure 1). The sum of partials for each sector does not add up to 676 (sample size) because respondents could select as many sectors as they wished.

Figure 1: Which sectors do you work in? (tick all that apply)



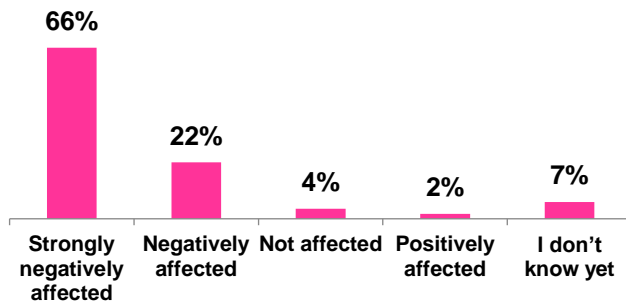
Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 - Base:676

The vast majority of respondents were freelancers working in high-end TV (322) and film (317). This is followed by 204 respondents operating in unscripted TV, 159 in other scripted TV and 129 in post-production. In addition, 68 respondents worked in children's TV, 34 in animation and 15 in VFX. Alongside these figures, 103 respondents classified themselves as working in other sectors within the screen industries e.g. training, news and current affairs, online content production, branded content and advertising, just to name a few.

## Key findings

By way of introduction, we asked respondents in what way their workload has been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. Figure 2 shows that 88% of the sample has been negatively affected by the hiatus caused by the lockdown. This percentage splits between 66%, who have been strongly negatively affected and a 22%, who have been negatively affected. Just under 5% of the sample has not been affected at all, and 7% of respondents just do not know yet. A very small percentage of the sample, equal to 2%, has experienced a positive impact.

Figure 2: In what way has your workload been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak?

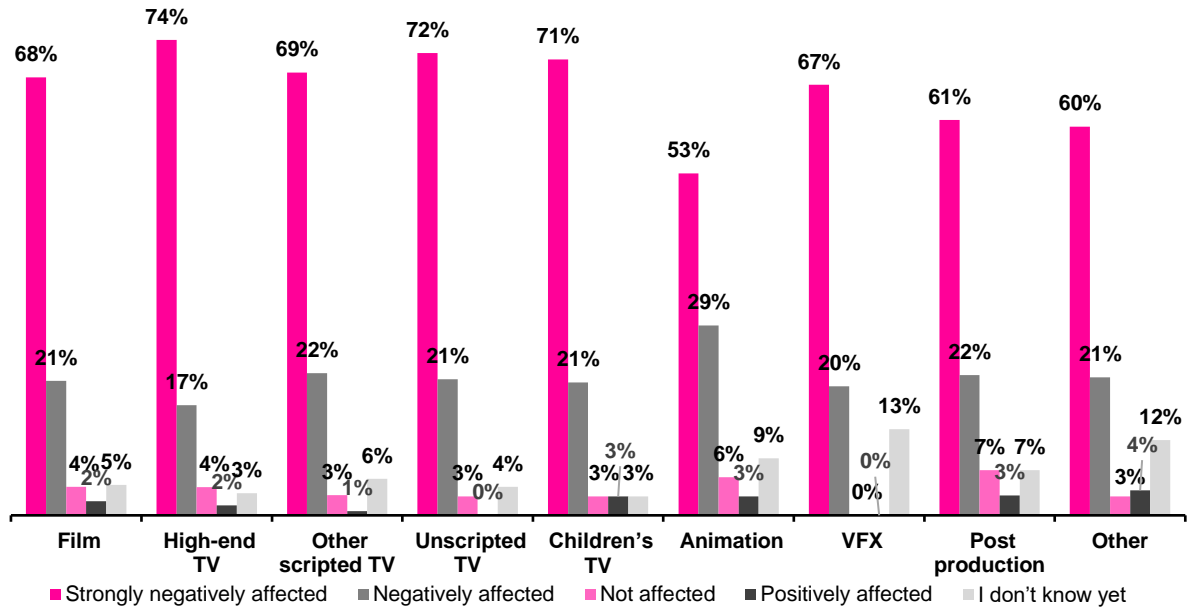


Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 - Base:676

Against a backdrop of negative impact on workload, there is a slight variation in the degree to which sectors have been affected. When looking at the breakdown in Figure 3, for example, high-

end TV registers the highest proportion of respondents stating that they have been strongly negatively affected (74%), followed by unscripted TV (71%).

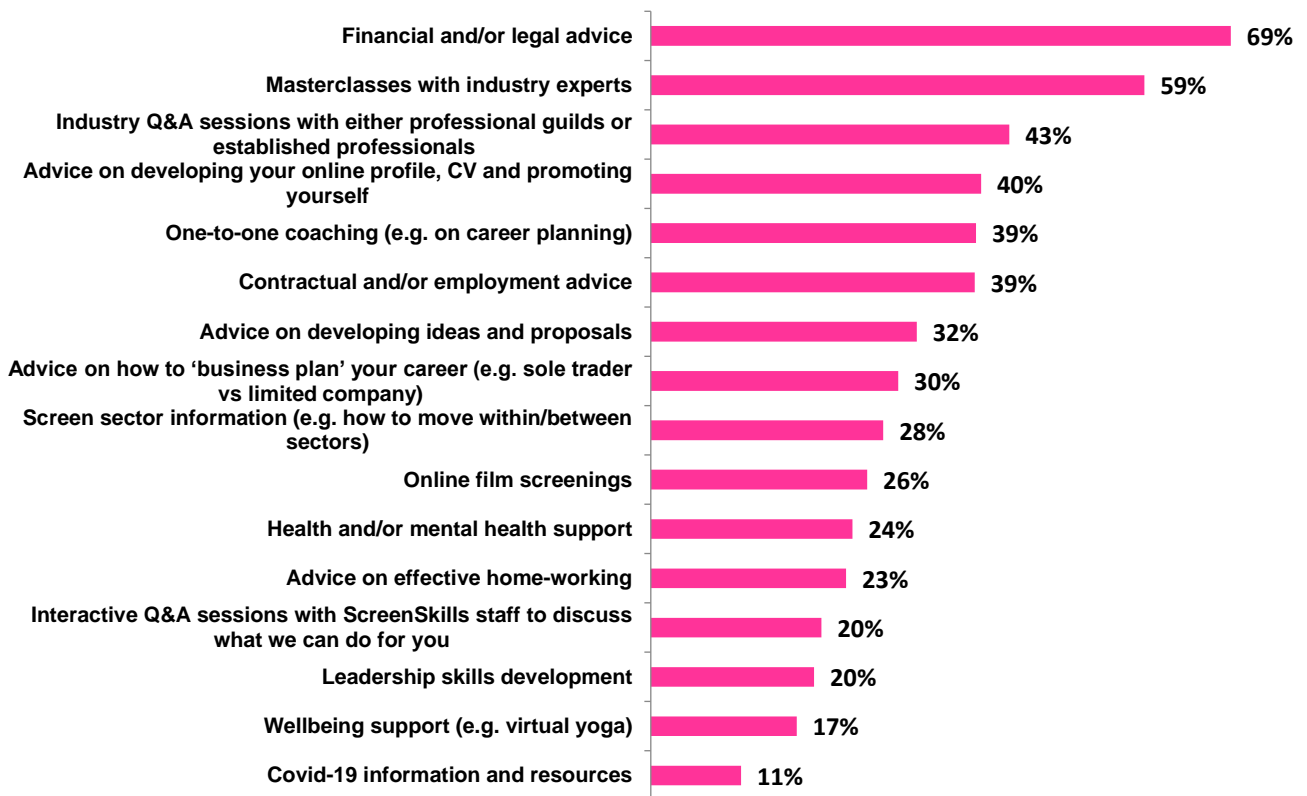
Figure 3: In what way has your workload been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak? (broken down by sectors)



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 - Base:676

Figure 4 sheds light on what the freelance workforce considered the most useful types of support in the current circumstances.

Figure 4: Types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 - Base:676

A breakdown by sector is provided in the appendix. Just under 70% of the sample has identified financial and/or legal advice as their main priority, suggesting the need to better understand how to navigate the welfare system as well as the new funding schemes that have been recently put in place by government, local councils, lenders and industry bodies. This finding is also in line with the large number of respondents that added additional comments in the open-text box of the survey, where a substantial majority expressed major concerns about their finances, how to make ends meet and what the future holds.

The crisis in confidence that these unprecedented circumstances has generated might explain the second most demanded type of support: masterclasses with industry experts. Suggesting the need to stay connected with industry during the lockdown and to gather insight and knowledge to prepare for the return to work, respondents seek a platform where they can listen to established leaders addressing a variety of topics. To date ScreenSkills has held masterclasses with industry figures including Dan Grabiner, Zac Beattie, Olly Lambert, Nicole Taylor and Lorraine Heggsey.

Similarly, industry Q&A sessions with either professional guilds or established professionals, a priority for 43% of the sample, seems to indicate the need to engage with those who can shed light on some of the vital questions that the freelance community is grappling with and offer useful industry insight.

Receiving advice on developing your online profile, CV and self-promotion is the fourth type of support recognised as a priority by 40% of respondents. This measure conveys a more forward-looking approach and denotes the need to plan longer-term, when the screen industries and the overall economy will be in the recovery phase. One-to-one coaching in relation, for example, to career planning, appears to indicate the same willingness to look ahead and plan for what comes next.

Film, high-end TV, other scripted TV, unscripted TV and children's TV are unanimous in their list of preferences – advice on financial support is the top priority, followed by masterclasses with industry experts and industry Q&A sessions with either professional guilds or established professionals. Respondents in the animation sector have the same priorities but in a slightly different order. The top priority for VFX respondents is to be advised on contractual, employment and financial matters, alongside improving leadership skills.

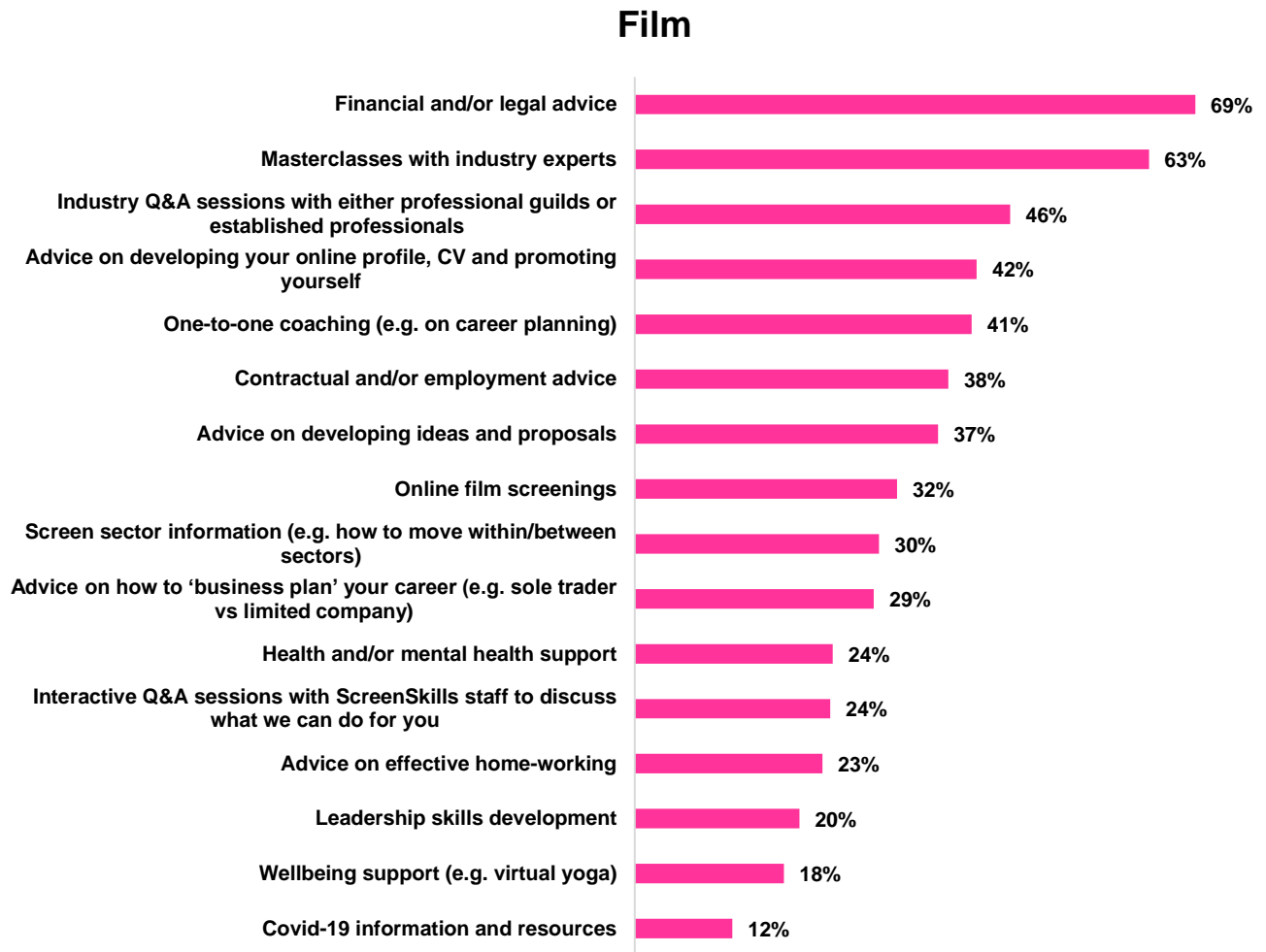
Respondents were also asked what type of skills they would like to enhance and develop during the forced downtime generated by the lockdown. This was an open-ended question where the sample was given the opportunity to list any training needs they would like to address.

Below an overview of the most cited:

1. Transferable skills: transferring skills between sectors; pitching successfully to commissioners or executives; mastering leadership skills, project management and line management skills, moving between sectors;
2. Job-specific skills: post-production skills, camera skills, writing and developing skills, storytelling skills for documentaries.

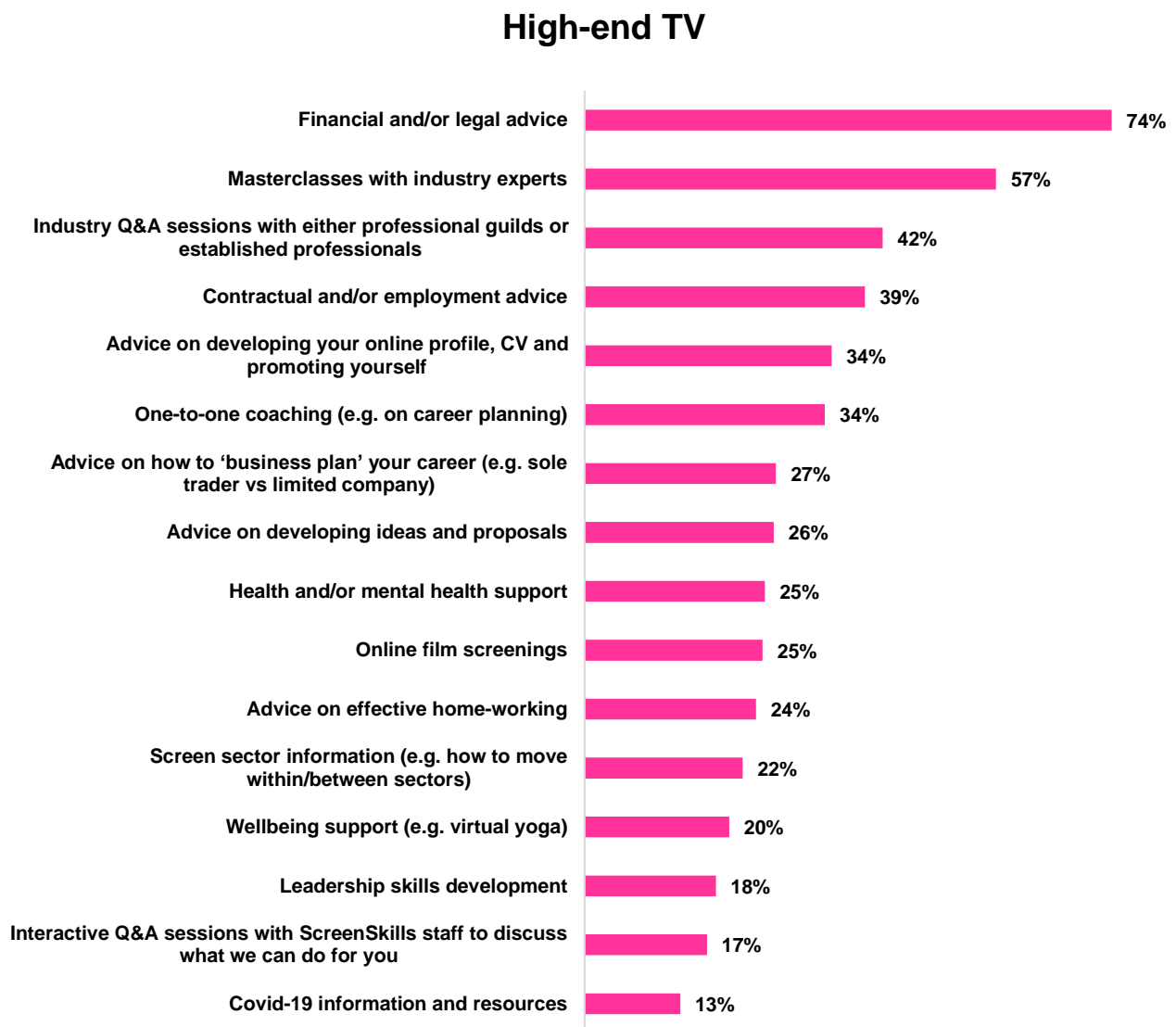
## Appendix

Figure 5: Film - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base: 317

Figure 6: High-end TV - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances

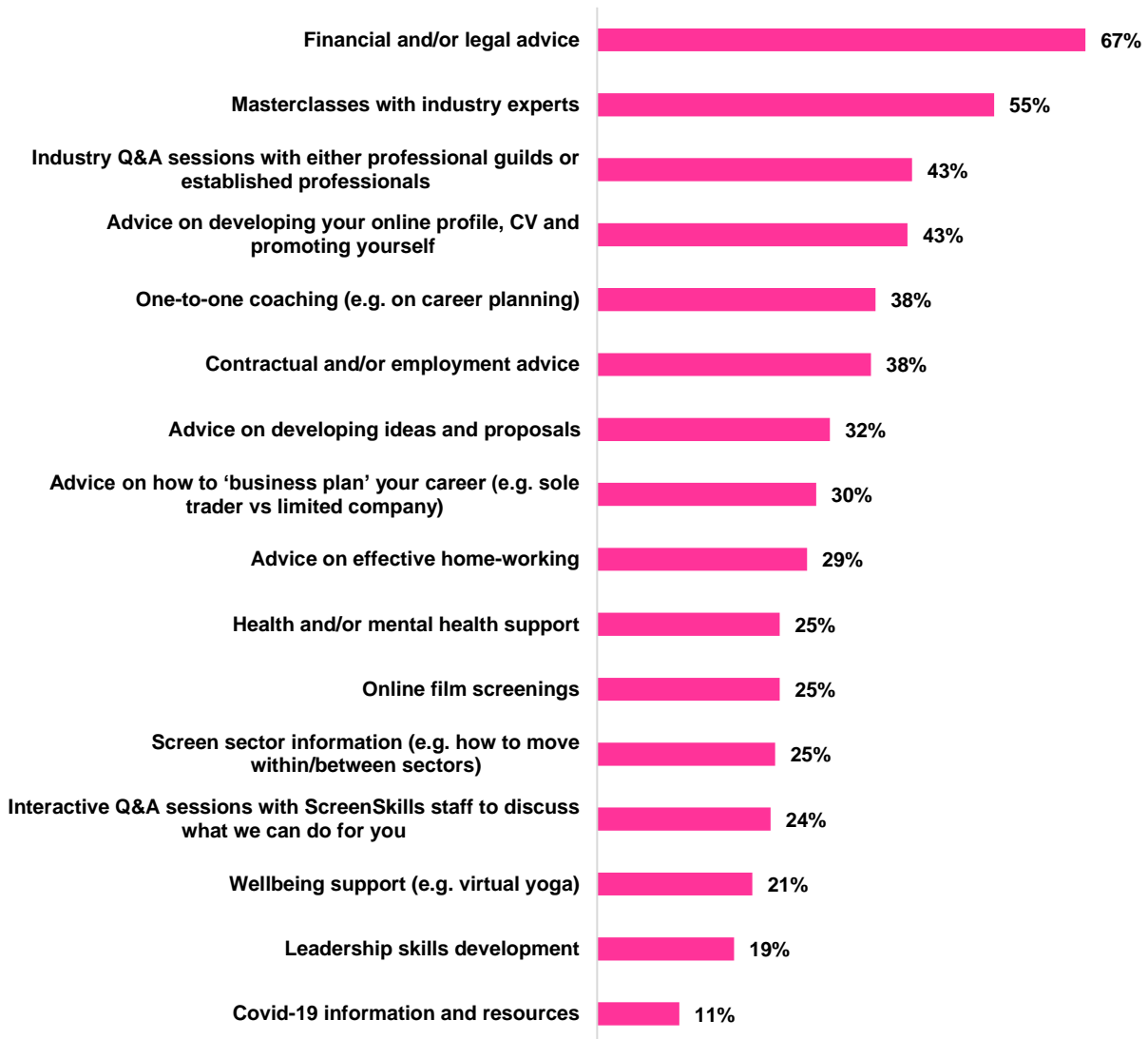


Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base: 322



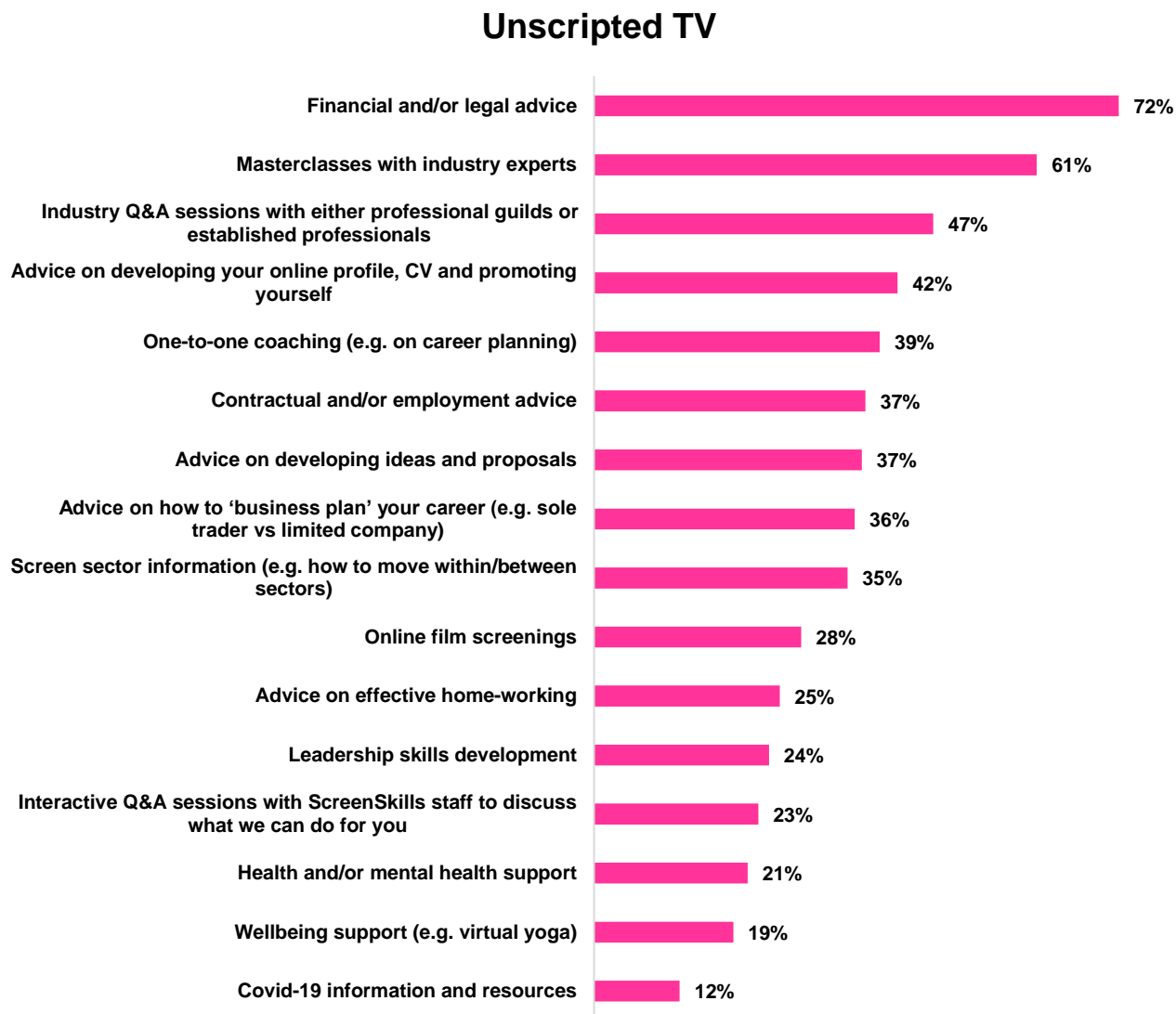
Figure 7: Other scripted TV - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances

### Other scripted TV



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base: 159

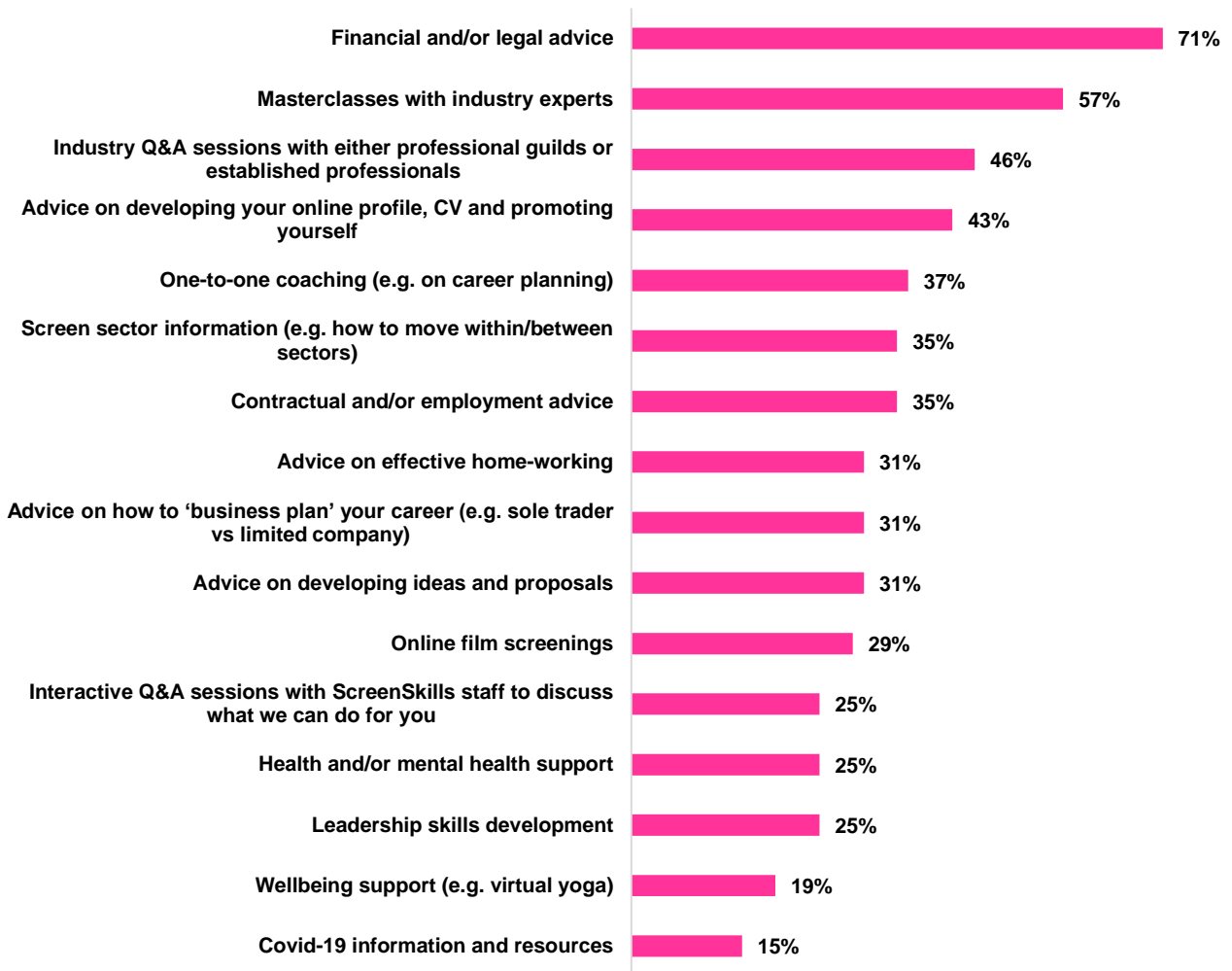
Figure 8: Unscripted TV - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base: 204

Figure 9: Children's TV - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances

### Children's TV



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base: 68

Figure 10: Animation - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances

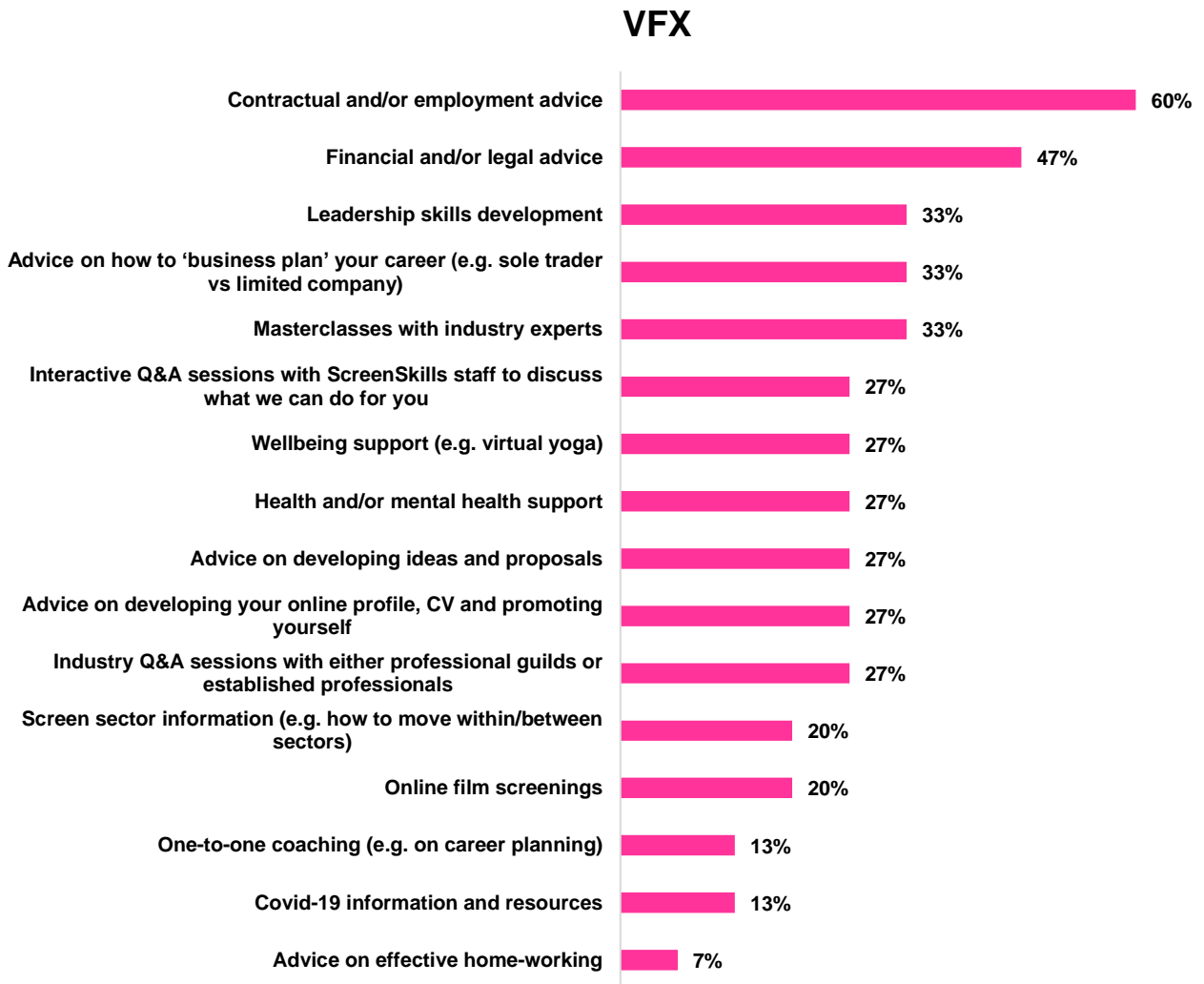
## Animation



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base: 34



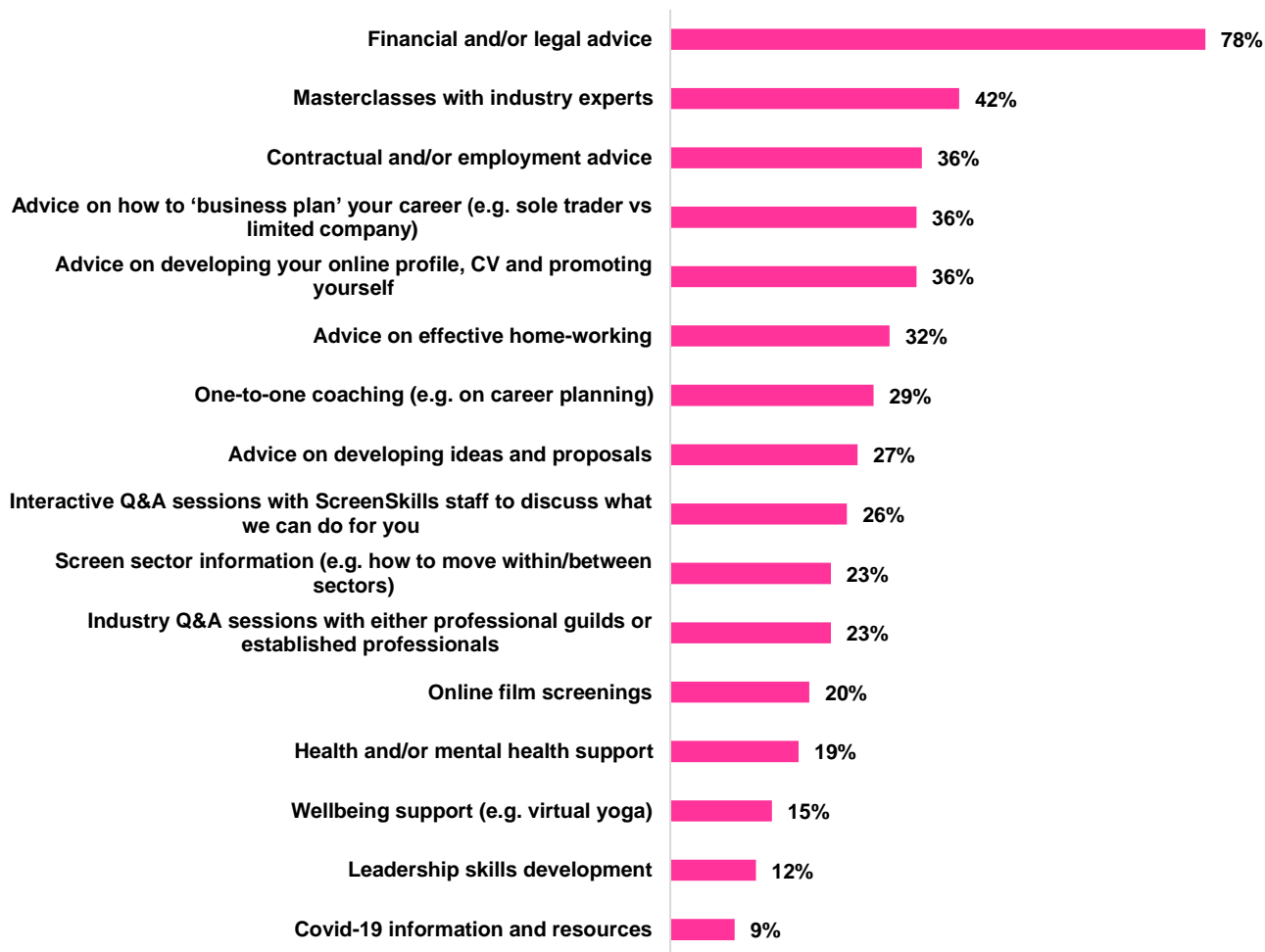
Figure 11 VFX - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base:15

Figure 12: Post-production - types of support that you particularly need or that could help you cope better in current circumstances

## Post-production



Source: ScreenSkills Freelancer Survey 2020 – Base: 129

