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# SUCCESSING IN THE FILM, TELEVISION AND GAMES INDUSTRIES

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Career progression and the keys to  
sustained employment for individuals  
from under-represented groups

*Summary of a report commissioned by the British  
Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) and  
Creative Skillset, with the British Film Institute (BFI)*

# CONTENTS

2	Executive Summary
2	1. Context and Aim of the Study
2	1.1 Methodology
3	2. The Findings
3	2.1 The common success factors for practitioners from under-represented groups
4	The Common Success Factors in Detail:
4	A. Taking an active role in career progression
6	B. Finding creative satisfaction
7	C. Embracing learning and skills development
9	D. Building beneficial relationships
12	E. Boosting confidence through support mechanisms
13	F. Developing strategies to overcome negative experiences
15	G. Demonstrating relevant characteristics and approaches
17	H. External influences on sustaining a successful career
18	2.2 The Employers' Perspective of the Findings
18	A. Building beneficial relationships
18	B. Support for career progression
19	C. The class ceiling
19	D. Risk aversion
19	2.2.1 Addressing industry practices
20	3. Conclusions and Next Steps
20	Combined Activity
20	BAFTA Activity
21	Creative Skillset Activity
21	BFI Activity (in its own words)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The findings are based on research<sup>1</sup> conducted to identify common factors (including behaviours and actions) that enable individuals from under-represented groups to sustain a career in the film, television and games industries.
- A number of common factors were found, to varying degrees, to play a part in enabling professionals across the three industries to sustain a career, regardless of their role. These were:
  - taking an active role in their own career progression;
  - finding an outlet to achieve creative satisfaction;
  - finding and embracing opportunities to learn and develop skills;
  - building beneficial relationships with a range of people;
  - using various support mechanisms to boost confidence;
  - developing strategies to overcome negative experiences;
  - demonstrating relevant characteristics and approaches;
  - external influences around company infrastructure and the wider industry.
- The study found that company structures, recruitment practices and mind-sets do create additional barriers with which practitioners from under-represented groups have to contend.
- Among employers, there was a large degree of consensus about the factors that support successful career progression and sustainability, and these aligned with those of the professionals from under-represented groups. Employers also acknowledged the role they and the wider industry can play in creating or removing barriers.
- BAFTA, Creative Skillset and the BFI have identified current and future activity that can support individuals from under-represented groups to progress and sustain a career in the screen industries.

## 1. CONTEXT AND AIM OF THE STUDY

High levels of film and television production and games development, key policy drivers, and a spotlight on addressing inequality and increasing diversity, have all led to a new focus on career sustainability and progression, in addition to entry-level opportunities.

The latest Creative Employment Survey 2015<sup>2</sup> found that employment levels of women in key occupations across film and television, and in games generally, compare unfavourably to general UK workforce statistics, and the overall proportion of people from BAME (black, Asian or minority ethnic) backgrounds is significantly lower than wider economy workforce data for London and the South East, where much of the film and television industries in particular are based.

The 2014 Creative Skillset Creative Media Workforce Survey collected data on socio-economic background by asking respondents if they had attended an independent/fee-paying school, and found this also compared unfavourably to the UK population as a whole<sup>3</sup>. Up-to-date statistics and data on disabled people in the workforce are not available, but it is anecdotally perceived to be low.

Those sectors most closely involved in the production of content (such as film production, independent television production, and animation) employ a far more casualised (freelance or short-term contract) workforce than others, raising potential challenges for both new entrants and the existing workforce.

In this context, this research was commissioned by BAFTA and Creative Skillset with the BFI to identify any common factors that enable individuals from under-represented groups to sustain and maintain a career in film, television or games. To our knowledge, this is the first research of its kind, and the first time individuals from under-represented groups have been asked, in such a coherent way, to comment on what has made them successful.

### 1.1. METHODOLOGY

The main research involved in-depth interviews with 50 professionals, all from one or more groups under-represented in their field – women, those from a BAME group, disabled people, or from a lower socio-economic background – who have successfully maintained their careers in film, television or games<sup>4</sup>. It is their insights that form the substantive qualitative input to this study.

In recognition that it is not solely the responsibility of the practitioner to create the conditions conducive to success, the themes that emerged from the interviews were interrogated with employers, and people who hire and represent professionals in the industries, to identify areas of alignment, difference and potential opportunities for collective action. Their responses, along with those from wider industry representatives, are reflected in Section 2 below.

Data was collected in several stages:

- Literature review: Identification and review of industry specific and generic literature and source data to explore key issues and themes surrounding the subject matter. This informed the development of the topic guide for the depth interviews with practitioners (see below).
- Secondary data analysis: Analysis of Creative Skillset's Creative Media Workforce Survey (2014) data to initially explore the characteristics and experiences of those in under-represented groups working in film, television or games. It was also used to identify a recruitment pool for the online survey and practitioner depth interviews.
- Industry influencer interviews: Thirteen semi-structured interviews took place with stakeholders, influencers or enablers active in, and with an influence on, diversity policy to:
  - provide the researchers with an accurate understanding of organisational activity in the policy area;
  - gather views and reflections on the wider policy context;
  - identify factors that support sustainability and progression;
  - provide access to further data;
  - help source research participants for the practitioner depth interviews;
  - ensure the project aligned with any related developments or policy formulation.
 Findings and reflections from the industry influencer interviews are included in Section 2.
- Online survey: A quantitative online survey was completed by 175 'successful' practitioners identified via Creative Skillset's Creative Media Workforce Survey (2014). Of these, 129 respondents belonged to one or more under-represented groups, while 47 respondents did not belong to any of these groups and so formed a 'comparative group' for analysis. The survey also served as a recruitment tool and criteria check for the practitioner depth interviews.
- Depth interviews with practitioners: 50 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with a range of successful female, BAME, disabled people or individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Practitioners were accessed via the online survey recruitment (detailed above), or through direct recommendations from industry personnel. The interviews set out to ascertain the factors, actions and behaviours behind individuals' sustained success.

- Focus groups (film and television) and industry interviews (games) with employers/hirers: Two separate methodologies were used for this stage of the project due to availability issues. The focus groups and interviews aimed to explore, from an employer's perspective, views of success, and factors and actions required from employers to support successful careers. This stage provided an opportunity to test the themes emerging from practitioner interviews, to see how these aligned with views from the 'people who hire'. It also explored how the actions taken by individuals were being, or could be, supported by wider action by employers.

## 2. THE FINDINGS

### 2.1 THE COMMON SUCCESS FACTORS FOR PRACTITIONERS FROM UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

A number of common factors were, to varying degrees, found to have played a part in enabling professionals from under-represented groups to sustain a successful career, regardless of their role:

- taking an active role in their own career progression;
- finding an outlet to achieve creative satisfaction;
- finding and embracing opportunities to learn and develop skills;
- building beneficial relationships with a range of people;
- using various support mechanisms to boost confidence;
- developing strategies to overcome negative experiences;
- demonstrating relevant characteristics and approaches;
- external influences around company infrastructure and the wider industry.

There was frequently a great deal of overlap between these success factors; for example, the importance of 'champions' played a part in and/or impacted on the formation of beneficial relationships, boosting confidence and developing resilience.

It must be noted that research participants felt strongly that they did not want to be defined solely by the under-represented group(s) to which they belong. A common sentiment was that – despite personally feeling that they faced more barriers and had to work harder than their counterparts – they let their work, personality and behaviour speak for them.

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# THE COMMON SUCCESS FACTORS IN DETAIL

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## A. Taking an active role in career progression

- Proactively seeking out opportunities;
- Developing a unique selling point;
- Formulating a plan;
- Taking risks to realise ambitions.

All research participants placed great importance on taking an active role in progressing their career. Central to this was the concept of developing a unique selling point to stand out from the competition. This frequently embraced their unique characteristics or perspective as a member of one or more under-represented groups; for example, being disabled, or a woman working in a very male environment. Others specialised in a specific area of work.

Formulating a plan and taking risks along the way were also seen as crucial to sustaining a successful career, whether as an employee moving ‘onwards and upwards’ or a freelancer planning their next steps for their next contract.



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### AMANDA FOSTER – STUNT ARTIST

Credits include: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*,  
*National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, *Edge of Tomorrow*

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As a single mother of three children, Amanda felt that it would not be practical to pursue her early ambition to become an actress. Instead, she did some modelling, and joined an agency that managed film extras, appearing in 350 films over a 10-year period. This gave her an opportunity to observe and get an understanding of the different aspects of production and the various roles involved. When she was working on *Patriot Games* with Harrison Ford, Amanda discovered that there were no black stunt women in the UK. She realised that this was a niche she might be able to fill, and so enrolled on a programme of training in six core stunt disciplines.

She took six years rather than the usual three to qualify, spreading the training out to fit in/extra film work she needed to raise the funds to pay for the next module of training, while also looking after her family: “It was physically, emotionally and financially tiring to keep going, but I knew I had to.” Amanda succeeded in joining the Stunt Register in 1997. Her first stunt job was doubling for Whoopi Goldberg, and her career has progressed from there.



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## JINX GODFREY – EDITOR

Credits include: *Man on Wire*, *Project Nim*,  
*The Theory of Everything*

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Starting work as an assistant editor in a commercials editing company, Jinx eventually began to edit television commercials and documentaries. Learning was all “on the hoof”, mastering AVID editing equipment and Final Cut Pro software. Jinx found editing documentaries very rewarding, working closely with a director to create the story they wanted to tell from the available footage.

Asked about what she has done to sustain her career, Jinx is very clear: “I figured out the kind of films I wanted to edit. I keep a close eye on the directors I admire. I found my niche. I am not a natural networker and I like to think that I’m judged on my work and the good relationships I’ve established while doing the work. Editors are often pigeon-holed, and I’ve tried not to allow that to happen. I deliberately maintain a mixed portfolio of work. I have to be very considered about the choices I make.”

*“I figured out the kind of films  
I wanted to edit. I keep a close  
eye on the directors I admire.  
I found my niche.”*

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## JET OMOSHEBI – SENIOR COLOURIST

Credits include: *The Night Manager*, *Da Vinci’s Demons*,  
*Great Expectations*

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Over the years, Jet has moved companies several times, often taking important clients with her, and also, during a recession, had a period as a freelancer. This could have been a very difficult time, but, because she had positive relationships with clients, they gave her work. “It taught me that you have to constantly be selling – you can’t sit and wait for work,” she says. This experience made her take a more proactive approach to managing her career: Jet keeps closely connected to any clients with whom she has worked well, through networking events and on social media. “You always need to have a story to tell, and let people know what you are up to,” she notes.

## B. Finding creative satisfaction

- Having a true passion for the work;
- Playing to personal strengths;
- Pursuing own passion projects;
- ‘Giving back’ to peers and newcomers.

Nearly all participants said maximising their enjoyment of working in their industry and having a real sense of creative satisfaction was important. The common message was that they have always, and will always, love their work, which serves to keep them positive in uncertain times, and underlines the importance of selecting projects carefully where possible.

Matching their career to their strengths, pursuing their own projects, and the creative license this allows, were also central to being able to sustain their success, particularly for freelancers. Extra-curricular work, such as mentoring or speaking at events, also provided a boost to this sense of work fulfilment for many research participants.



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### DES GAYLE – INDEPENDENT GAME DEVELOPER AND PRODUCER

Credits include: *FIFA franchise, Life is Strange, Quarterback Club*

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At age 18, Des was working in McDonalds, spending a good deal of his free time playing video games, with no real idea of what he wanted to do with his life. When the HR manager mentioned that her husband was a game developer for LEGO, and was about to recruit testers, Des applied. Within a few days, he was in the job of his dreams, laying the foundations for a successful career, where he would use his game-playing skills.

Des’s career developed quickly, and – over the next 15 years – he strategically moved companies, gaining experience with a number of industry leaders, including Electronic Arts, Crytek, Square Enix and Microsoft (where he worked on the launch of the original Xbox), rising to senior production positions, before becoming sought after as a consultant. He now runs his own games studio, Altered Gene.

*Des is actively involved in a schools outreach programme aimed at inspiring talented and ambitious students – especially from BAME groups – to explore opportunities in games.*

Passionate about games and the opportunities the industry can offer, Des is actively involved in a schools outreach programme aimed at inspiring talented and ambitious students – especially from BAME groups – to explore opportunities in games. Des feels that the current lack of role models is a continuing problem, and one he is determined to change.



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## HELANA SANTOS – GAMES PROGRAMMER

Credits include: *LA Cops*, *Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two*, *Ace of Spades*, *The Cat that Got the Milk*, *The Button Affair*

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Helana joined the games industry as a programmer shortly after completing a degree in Computer Science. Her professional confidence increased as time went on: “The big change resulted from a period when I was part of a small team working on a huge AAA (big budget) game for Disney. We did not have easy access to any senior programmers, and so I had to up my game, demonstrate that I could work at a more responsible level, although I was not offered any increased status or money.” That experience proved invaluable when she and Ollie Clarke, a colleague at Blitz Games, set up their own company – Modern Dream, where Helana is technical director – shortly after Blitz Games closed.

At that point, Helana and Ollie felt in a good position to set up a second business together, Arch Creatives, with another colleague from Blitz and two other “very experienced” individuals. Unique in the area, Arch Creatives is a not-for-profit shared workspace for digital creatives, offering a range of services including mentoring, training and business support, and running inspirational careers information programmes in local schools and colleges.

### C. Embracing learning and skills development

- Seeking out learning opportunities;
- Broadening existing skillset.

Embracing opportunities to learn and develop skills was also a key factor in sustaining a successful career for most research participants. The focus was on being proactive in finding development opportunities, or simply keeping up to date with new technology or working practices, rather than benefitting from formal training. Always learning from everyone and everything, and always asking questions, were common attitudes among research participants.



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## JET OMOSHEBI – SENIOR COLOURIST

Credits include: *The Night Manager*, *Da Vinci's Demons*, *Great Expectations*

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Offered a job in the transfer office of a leading Soho post-production company “because of my absolute enthusiasm”, Jet immediately loved the idea of working with film. Despite a lack of formal qualifications, she was interested in learning about technical equipment, and, as a young black woman, she believes this made her stand out. During quiet periods, Jet would spend time sitting in the film grading department, observing what was being done and asking questions. The head of department “saw my enthusiasm and jumped on it” and offered to train her to be a

colourist. Over a period of about three years, “he took me under his wing”, becoming a life-changing mentor. She credits this training as the foundation of her future success: “People seem to be expected to just absorb knowledge. Male colleagues seem to do a lot of their learning by talking about work in the pub. I had a child to get home to, so that would never have worked for me.”

“Male colleagues seem to do a lot of their learning by talking about work in the pub. I had a child to get home to, so that would never have worked for me.”

Another important factor was being employed in a company with a reputation for doing very high quality work, full of expert people who would share knowledge and give advice if asked. Her mentor taught her that to move forward she had to go on learning and not be afraid to ask questions. Jet thinks many women are reluctant to display a lack of knowledge in case it undermines their credibility, and this can hold them back.

A number of her key clients are beginning to specialise in feature films and, to sustain her career, Jet has plans to progress into that medium with them. She is expanding her knowledge of films and filmmaking and is learning (often from younger people who enter the business with a high level of computer literacy) to use new types of machinery and equipment.

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## RON BAILEY – SOUND MIXER

Credits include: *The Mummy Returns*, *M.I. High*, *Silent Witness*

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Always interested in music and sound and the technology associated with recording, Ron – from a working-class background in multicultural Camden – started his working life in engineering. He then made a positive decision, not just to “get in” but to “get spotted” in the film industry: “I think the hardest thing was to get into a social group of that mixture, and feel comfortable and confident.”

Ron set about gaining experience on film sets and managed to find some voluntary work as a runner. Determined to create a good impression, he made himself as helpful as possible and soon realised that his “tech savviness” was a real asset. This led to his first sound assistant opportunity – a real learning experience. Although he says he was “terrible”, a friend of the person who had given him this break invited Ron to work for him as an assistant (“He taught me everything”), which led to him being offered a job on *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

Wanting to “do it properly”, Ron took a three-year sound course at the National Film and Television School. “It made sense for me to learn about everyone else’s roles, so we can work together, so they could help me – to me that was the key element, working as a team.” His postgraduate career in film developed, moving up quickly from boom operator to sound recordist, and working on major features across the world.

Although he loved making feature films, after several years, Ron felt that he was missing out on family life, and took a positive decision to take his skills into television. He found the working styles and timescales on set very different to film and he worked hard to establish credibility and become accepted by people who did not know him, and were suspicious of his film experience. By being humble and accepting that he had a lot to learn, people were generous with their knowledge. Now he has a reputation for getting film quality sound on the set of a television recording.

Ron ensures he keeps up to date with technology, goes to industry events, reads journals, and visits manufacturers to develop relationships with them and learn about the new kit.

## D. Building beneficial relationships

- Having an ‘enabling’ champion;
- Finding and nurturing potential collaborators;
- Strategically selecting collaborators;
- Actively promoting oneself to others;
- Networking strategically;
- Communicating effectively – learning the cultural codes.

An enabling relationship with a ‘champion’ with whom research participants had a natural bond – such as a manager, a creative collaborator, a patron/sponsor and/or head of department, or talent agent – was seen as a real catalyst for progressing and sustaining a career.

In addition to having a champion, building new relationships and contacts, and being proactive about it, also factored highly. Many research participants talked about strategically selecting people to work with, contacting/keeping in touch with people they respected, and taking a targeted approach.

Self-promotion, both self-managed and with the assistance of an agent, was intrinsic to building and sustaining such relationships. Being part of industry networks, a member of industry organisations, and attending events were also all seen as good opportunities to meet people and develop beneficial relationships through informal networking. This was recognised as a part of ‘what one has to do’ and although some research participants felt uncomfortable networking, they were nevertheless proactive in improving their skills in this area.

For relationship-building, great significance was placed on having good interpersonal and team-working skills. Listening and responding well to others were critical skills for freelancers and employees alike, with many seeing positive impacts of working in such a way. Likewise, having a deep understanding of specific team cultures was also viewed as critical to developing beneficial relationships.



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### RIZ AHMED – ACTOR

Credits include: *Four Lions*, *Nightcrawler*, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

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Riz comes from a low-income Pakistani background. A scholarship to a top independent school, followed by degree studies at Oxford University, gave him a considerable insight into white middle-class social codes, which he would not have otherwise had, and which have helped him navigate the industry. Riz’s acting talent was identified when he was a teenager, but his cultural and economic background (where there was an emphasis on financial stability), coupled with the paucity of visible minority role models, meant he never seriously considered a career as an actor until a peer at university encouraged him to apply to drama school.

Riz was offered a scholarship to attend the Central School of Speech and Drama to study classical acting, but couldn't afford the fees to attend, despite securing an Arts and Humanities Research Board grant for his MA. Thelma Holt – an influential theatre producer – met him through his university drama group and found a private sponsor to make up the gap in Riz's school fees.

He did well at drama school, but the continuing lack of brown and black faces in substantial on-screen roles made him feel like the industry offered few opportunities for him. As a result, a few months before the end of his course, Riz was considering training to become a lawyer, until his photo on the drama school website was spotted by the team casting for *The Road to Guantanamo*. Riz met director Michael Winterbottom and was cast in the film. He was then cast in two other projects in quick succession.

Choosing an agent who is genuinely interested in helping him develop has been important to Riz – in his experience he found it is easy to “get lost in the mix” with a bigger agent. He had to change agents a few times before finding one who he felt fully supported him.

In addition to his agent, Riz has formed key relationships with director Michael Winterbottom, who has now cast him a few times, and directors Peter Kosminsky and Yann Demange, who have both mentored him as a budding writer-director.

*In addition to his agent, Riz has formed key relationships with director Michael Winterbottom, who has now cast him a few times, and directors Peter Kosminsky and Yann Demange, who have both mentored him as a budding writer-director.*



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### DES GAYLE – INDEPENDENT GAME DEVELOPER AND PRODUCER

Credits include: *FIFA franchise, Life is Strange, Quarterback Club*

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Des reflects on his experience over 18 years working with such leading games studios as Electronic Arts, Crytek, Square Enix and Microsoft, which led to establishing his own games studio, Altered Gene, in 2013. He believes that the main reason for his success was because he really valued the people he worked with, and that this interest was reflected in the quality of work his teams produced. “Work is all about performance,” he notes, “and that comes from people, not numbers.”

Every time Des started a new contract (and he has worked all over the world), he always began by getting to know each individual, exploring what motivated them and how they preferred to learn. He set about each project with the intention of making a personal impact and adding value. People were impressed by this approach, and recommended him for projects. By the time he set up his own business, Des had a reputation for leadership and had made excellent contacts across the industry.

Des and his staff at Altered Gene have real strengths in coding, but are realistic about their talent gaps when it comes to art and design. He is convinced that the future success of his company, and other small independent companies, will depend on strategic collaborations, “then we can produce really high quality games.” Strategic networking, and identifying individuals with complementary skills and interests, spurred him to initiate an informal professional support group (“we text and Skype each other a lot, and meet at industry events”), and he is always on the lookout for people to whom he can be of value (and vice-versa).

In his experience, many people do not make the most of networking opportunities. He has learnt to always research individuals before they are likely to meet, in order to discover who may be the most useful person to talk to about, for example, mobile marketing. It also works in reverse; he is happy to share knowledge and experience with people who have put some effort into learning about him.

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## NAOMIE HARRIS – ACTOR

Credits include: *28 Days Later*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, *Skyfall*, *Spectre*, *Moonlight*, *Collateral Beauty*

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Director Danny Boyle gave Naomi her first big break after drama school: “When Danny was auditioning for the film *28 Days Later*, he wanted to find the best actor for each role, irrespective of colour or ethnicity. The role I auditioned for was, in fact, written as white, but Danny chose to audition in a ‘colour blind’ way, which ultimately gave me a fantastic start to my career.” The film achieved both commercial and critical success and – very importantly – did well in America. A US agent approached her, signed her up and started to put her forward for Hollywood auditions.

Naomie was offered a role in the film *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, which raised her profile internationally and offers of work started to flood in. Naomie believes the calibre of her agent, and the respect she commanded among casting directors, was key.

Acting in the *Bond* film franchise has helped “massively” and industry awards have also had a positive effect on her career development.

She believes that having an agent who understands what she wants to achieve is crucial, and it is a relationship Naomie actively manages. Not a natural networker, Naomie says, “my agent does that for me.”

## E. Boosting confidence through support mechanisms

- Champions/mentors as sounding boards;
- Consulting with peers;
- Pushing outside of comfort zone.

Many research participants spoke about the importance of having encouragement from others, and the benefits they had reaped from it. Again, mentors or champions played an important role in boosting confidence and helping them to get ahead. This emotional support network also extended to peers, family and friends, with hubs being particularly praised by research participants in the games industry. Not only did this encouragement serve to help them through tough times, it also pushed many on to greater things. For example, leaving their comfort zone to take on public speaking engagements.



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### JORDAN HOGG – DRAMA DIRECTOR

Credits include: *Coronation Street*, *Casualty*, *The Evermoor Chronicles*

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Jordan started his career through a Channel 4 training scheme for disabled filmmakers. After the scheme finished, he was offered work through the contacts he had made on *Shameless* and at Channel 4; initially *Hollyoaks* and then other big soaps including *Doctors*.

Jordan was determined to break into hour-long drama and broaden his portfolio. This proved very hard (“Nobody wants you without experience”), but a producer with whom he had worked really well on *Doctors*, and who had subsequently moved on to *Casualty*, managed to ‘sell’ Jordan’s abilities to *Casualty*’s series producer.

*Casualty* took him to a new level – giving him wider industry recognition – and he was thrilled to be selected to be one of the directors on a “dream job” for Disney, *The Evermoor Chronicles*, where he was working alongside a director whose style he much admired. They have formed a “mutual support” partnership, speaking every week and helping each other to develop professionally: “We both have goals to work towards. My next one is to walk through the arch of Pinewood Studios, and say I work there.”

Other factors for his success, he says, were some very important people, most notably his mother, who always said, “If you want something, go and get it. There is nothing stopping you”; his mentor from the Channel 4 scheme; a highly regarded television director who taught on the NFTS course, and subsequently introduced Jordan to a number of people who “opened doors” for him; and – more recently – his wife, who was able to give him financial stability and support in the early days of his freelance career.

*[Jordan and a fellow director] have formed a ‘mutual support’ partnership, speaking every week and helping each other to develop professionally*



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## HELANA SANTOS – GAMES PROGRAMMER

Credits include: *LA Cops*, *Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two*, *Ace of Spades*, *The Cat that Got the Milk*, *The Button Affair*

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Helana Santos, co-founder and technical director at Modern Dream, is proud of what she has achieved in the games industry, as well as co-founding Arch Creatives – a not-for-profit shared workspace for digital creatives. Being part of a collaborative group of professionals has worked really well: “It was a gamble, especially as there is such a mix of talent and knowledge under one roof, but the benefit is that there is always someone to ask.”

Helana also improved her skills through other industry activities, particularly as a BAFTA member and board member of games trade body Ukie, where she represents the interests of small studios and leads the diversity work group. Through Ukie, Helana was invited to attend a debate in Parliament with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Video Games. “I never thought I would do anything like that,” she says.

## F. Developing strategies to overcome negative experiences

- Developing resilience to prejudices;
- Developing an approach to counteract barriers;
- Diversifying income streams;
- Taking the time to re-energise.

Being able to rise above negative experiences and develop resilience to, and strategies to counteract, prejudices were also described as key behaviours by some research participants. Often cited as necessary generally in an industry where being able to take rejection is part of the process, it was also talked about specifically as a way of responding to prejudice or bias based on gender, race, disability or class. This included having alternative income streams to increase personal autonomy and avoid reliance on one source.



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## RIZ AHMED – ACTOR

Credits include: *Four Lions*, *Nightcrawler*, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

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Despite playing lead roles in the award-winning and BAFTA-nominated *The Road to Guantanamo* and *Shifty*, and the BAFTA-winning *Four Lions*, Riz went through a few years of getting hardly any acting work. Instead, he spent a great deal of time working on his music as a rap artist, and started to get noticed for this. The two passions “fed into each other” and, because of the profile he received from his music, people approached him and he began to broaden his network and attract offers of work.

However, the pattern of finding himself out of work, despite appearing in acclaimed films or performances, continued. Riz feels this is due to a systemic lack of diversity in the business. Believing that actors from minority ethnic groups must work twice as hard to get half as far, Riz developed an increasingly rigorous approach to his work, took up acting classes in between jobs and for auditions, and keeps a detailed document of lessons learned from each acting experience. Since in the past he did not get to audition or work as often as his white peers, he feels it is important for him to extract the maximum value from each job in terms of developing his craft.

Reflecting on how he has managed to develop and maintain a successful career, Riz says: “It has been a marathon, not a sprint. I have benefitted from having a range of creative interests, which have fed into each other in unexpected ways. But I think it’s twice as hard for minority actors than it is for white counterparts to achieve success. This is still the case, and I don’t see things improving much, to be honest, without concerted and decisive action on the part of funding bodies.”

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### CAROLINE O’REILLY – SCRIPT SUPERVISOR AND PRODUCER

Credits include: *Band of Brothers*, *An Education*,  
*In the Heart of the Sea*, *Foyle’s War*, *Doc Martin*

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Caroline wanted to work in television production from an early age. She found that careers advice for women at that time was to start as a secretary and then take advantage of the high-quality training offered by some broadcasters. She joined Thames Television, but experienced prejudice when she first applied for a place on their highly competitive Production Assistant scheme. Some of the panel members were not convinced that, as a person with a physical disability, she would be able to do the job.

Fortunately, one of the panel members was impressed by her determination to get on to the programme, so encouraged her to apply again the following year. He became her ‘champion’ and they are still in touch many years later. He set up a production attachment for Caroline at Thames Television, which helped her to improve her skills and gain a range of skills and experience that made her a better candidate, and she was selected for the scheme at the second attempt.

Although Caroline now looks back on the experience of the scheme as crucial to her later success, it was not plain sailing; she felt that some people wanted her to fail and that there were many able-bodied people who believed they could do the job better than she could. This experience set the tone for all her future professional life: Caroline has worked hard to build a reputation based on pure professionalism and hard work. Most people (and she wants it to be like this) have no idea that she is disabled until she is three or four weeks into a shoot. In her experience, people expect someone with a physical disability to lack stamina and so she has made sure that her CV demonstrates her track record of handling tough assignments, including a year in the trenches working on the television mini-series *Band of Brothers* and coping with challenges that would be daunting for many able-bodied people. “I have to show that I’m better than other candidates for a job,” Caroline says.



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## NAOMIE HARRIS – ACTOR

Credits include: *28 Days Later*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, *Skyfall*, *Spectre*, *Moonlight*, *Collateral Beauty*

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Naomie feels it is essential to remain confident in her own ability to cope with the inevitable setbacks. Making decisions, “steering your own ship”, and being prepared to say ‘no’ to things that she does not feel are right, requires resilience. She recommends, “surrounding yourself with people who are as hungry to do good work as you are, who will help you maintain your passion,” and never lowering personal standards, or allowing yourself to become typecast. For Naomie, taking breaks between films is essential, and having a life outside of acting is also very important.

*Making decisions, ‘steering your own ship’, and being prepared to say ‘no’ to things that she does not feel are right, requires resilience*

## G. Demonstrating relevant characteristics and approaches

Research participants felt that the characteristics and behaviours that they manifested were important in being able to sustain a career in the film, television and games sectors. Included in the list of ‘must-have’ characteristics were: determination, tenacity, confidence, positivity, enthusiasm, flexibility, adaptability, having integrity and being true to themselves.

Being able to fit in with various teams and working environments – including being ‘likeable’, by getting on with people – was also considered to be incredibly important. Faced with potential barriers to progression and success, research participants also made sure they were eminently employable by setting out to be the best that they could be and to shine from the outset.



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## RON BAILEY – SOUND MIXER

Credits include: *The Mummy Returns*, *M.I. High*, *Silent Witness*

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Having worked on feature films for several years before deciding to move into television, Ron says: “I got on those Hollywood movies because I was keen, dedicated and easy to get on with. I was a likeable character and people wanted me on their projects ... I wouldn’t say ‘I’m not doing this, this isn’t working,’ I would say, ‘how can we find a way to move forward?’”

*“I was a likeable character and people wanted me on their projects ... I wouldn’t say ‘I’m not doing this, this isn’t working’, I would say, ‘how can we find a way to move forward?’”*



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## JET OMOSHEBI – SENIOR COLOURIST

Credits include: *The Night Manager*, *Da Vinci's Demons*,  
*Great Expectations*

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Once Jet had gained her technical skills in colour grading, it became evident that what “made me shine” was her ability to communicate effectively with clients. “My superpower is being able to be very intuitive,” she says, “to really listen and get to understand what the client wants.” She feels that she is unusual in this respect: “We are in a communications industry, but lots of people aren’t good at it.” Because so few women work in technical roles, it is, she feels, important to establish client confidence very quickly and so she always aims to make a positive first impression: “The first ten minutes are crucial.”

There is “nothing magic” about her success, she says, it has all resulted from “self-reliance, self-motivation, and self-discipline.”

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## JORDAN HOGG – DRAMA DIRECTOR

Credits include: *Coronation Street*, *Casualty*, *The Evermoor Chronicles*

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Once “through the door”, Jordan believes that people enjoy working with him. Feedback suggests that he is regarded as focused and very competent, able to rethink things when there are problems, confident and outgoing. He is also seen as very ambitious, and as someone who makes opportunities, rather than someone who waits for things to happen. Jordan’s mentor trained him to be the “first in and the last to leave” each day, and he thinks that his visible love for his work is a real asset. He says he needs his agent to ensure he gets paid, as he loves his work so much he would do it for free.

## H. External influences on sustaining a successful career

- A supportive company infrastructure;
- Wider industry factors.

Outside influences on sustaining a successful career were also noted. These included: being able to develop cross-genre and wider skills, as part of a supportive company infrastructure; being aware of, and able to benefit from, changes taking place across the sectors, such as technological and production innovations and growth; and receiving recognition from others in the form of awards or peer respect.

Examples of external influences are evident in the case studies above. Below are additional quotes from other interview participants that illustrate the importance of these factors:

*“Being at [company x] has been very important as it has been possible to move around the organisation on secondments and find out more about the industry and which role would suit my skills the best. It also gives me the opportunity to make lots of new relationships, which has had a huge impact on my career.”*

– Female camera operator in the television industry

*“Working at [company x] was great as they had an access unit to support with things like driving and doing stuff on set.”*

– Disabled female working in the television industry

*“Everything changed in the late '80s and early '90s. Channel 4 broke through and suddenly there was more diversity, as people wanted different types of people to work on different types of projects. It was my time.*

*I wasn't an assistant for very long.”*

– Male, BAME, sound mixer from a lower socio-economic background

*“We put blood sweat and tears into [game x] so getting an award was amazing, especially as our competition were multi-million pound budget games. It raised the profile of the game, so people know about it now and you get more respect as a result, which is helpful for opening doors.”*

– Female co-founder of an independent studio in the games industry

*“Winning awards is amazing and great for raising your profile and also for networking. It keeps your name up there, though unfortunately pay doesn't go up as a result. It's very important to US companies though, so that has huge potential benefits.”*

– Female sound editor in the television industry

## 2.2 THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE OF THE FINDINGS

The research found a high degree of consensus among employers about the factors that support successful career progression and sustainability, which aligned with those of the professionals from under-represented groups. The highest levels of congruence were reflected in the need to build and sustain relationships, and the requirement for individuals to take responsibility for their own career progression, often without support or structure.

From the responses, general themes – as well as examples of good practice aimed at increasing diversity at mid-career level – emerged across the film, television and games industries from the perspective of employers and industry representatives. These included challenging unconscious bias and risk aversion; opening out recruitment; and acknowledging social class as a key issue.

### A. Building beneficial relationships

Employers felt that an essential factor in career sustainability and progression was making and sustaining relationships. Employers described recruitment and contracting decisions based on existing relationships, often through personal contacts and networks.

In the film and television industries, the nature of many productions requires confidence that talent managers or hirers can react at speed to provide a cadre of 'names' to underpin commercial impact, and/or guarantee a team, crew or key personnel who will deliver excellent and known skills:

*"The employment structure of freelancing is built on relationships. Of course, skill and ability to work under pressure are vital, but ultimately a head of department is going to employ you if they know you or someone they know can vouch for you."*

– Agent, film industry

There is already a more formalised and open recruitment process for many junior and mid-career roles in the games, post-production and VFX industries. However, many senior programmers, artists and producers were also often reported as being recruited through personal contacts, or because people were known to have the skills and experience required for the development or to attract investment:

*"It's risky to take on someone you don't know because the time and cost is so precious. When a game goes into development, we contact our known stars."*

– Human resources manager, games industry

There is, however, awareness of the need to expand the talent pool that the industry draws upon. There is also some evidence that the informal nature of recruitment is beginning to change: employers talked about a willingness to extend and share contacts, to reach out to people they have not worked with before, and to look beyond some of their more established networks.

### B. Support for career progression

Most employers and industry representatives felt that there was a lack of structure to support career progression, and very little opportunity, in the context of pressurised time and budgets, to 'bring on' people and support their career progression. As well as the cost for individual freelancers<sup>5</sup> associated with progressing careers, this was often cited by employers as a barrier and was recognised as a problem across all industries. This was seen as a critical issue, as production and development levels are high and more people are needed at senior levels to work on larger scale, larger budgeted productions.

Employers reflected that making the move to a higher level involved breaking the 'catch-22' cycle, where career or grade progression requires experience but individuals cannot get the essential experience without credits or proof that they can do the job.

*"Informality and lack of structure means that we sometimes 'throw away gold'. People hit a ceiling and can't see how to break through."*  
– Executive, television industry

Many employers noted that, in the absence of career progression structures and lack of career 'footholds' in freelance and contract employment, more informal career advice would be helpful for individuals.

Employers also felt that a wider and deeper engagement – for example, through the informal mentoring of people from under-represented groups – would be a good route to supporting mid-career progression or those experiencing points of career transition.

*"We should all be mentors, I benefited from a mentor, unofficially, and now that I am in a position to do the same, I will."*  
– Managing director, games

Within larger companies and studios, shadowing initiatives – where an individual observes a more experienced person for a period of time – were considered helpful as they allow individuals to gain experience at senior levels. However, organising shadowing could prove more difficult in the freelance world or in smaller companies.

*“Career progression is about equal access to opportunities, creating middle level shadowing will de-risk middle level progression.”*

– Head of department, film

*“There should be more middle-career training but not more initiatives. Commissioning budgets should provide opportunities for shadowing and ‘stepping-up’ programmes.”*

– Line producer, television industry

Although outside the scope of this study, there was also an emphasis on maintaining and increasing the flow of new entrants from all backgrounds, in terms of their impact on the future pipeline of mid-career practitioners.

### C. The class ceiling

Employers indicated that a persistent challenge to progression was that, in UK society, ‘class’ underpins and cuts across all areas of representation. It is less visible than certain other characteristics, and can form a hidden barrier to progression. For example, the structural issues impacting on the sustainability of careers creates a high financial barrier for those without backing, personal contacts or the ability to take the risk of an irregular income. In addition, cultural codes and class norms can affect those perceived as not being part of the ‘in’ group.

*“In film, you have to know the people who make the decisions (about film funding) and speak their language, but it really helps if you have family money and backing. Being BAME is not the issue, it’s being working class and not having contacts or money to smooth your way.”*

– Industry influencer

*“Class is a real issue and the more successful and senior you are, the more that becomes apparent. Cultural reference points, protocols and confidence become just as important as ideas and skills.”*

– Industry influencer

*“The freelance nature of employment means that people have to want to work with you again and that you share the same ways of relaxing and downtime.”*

– Head of department, television

### D. Risk aversion

Particularly in terms of ‘above the line’ talent, many employers see the industry as increasingly risk-averse, with an over-reliance on ‘names’ and established talent, triggering commissioning decisions based on tried and tested formulas and hiring people with a track record. Consequently, many agents and talent managers reported finding it difficult to bring in new talent and give them the opportunity and exposure. Moreover, many employers also raised the prevalence of appointing actors and ‘above the line’ talent on the basis of their background, gender and ethnicity, which perpetuates typecasting and was

often the result of ‘unthinking stereotyping’, which needed to be explored further and challenged:

*“There seems to be a formulaic approach to risk and ratings and that is a result of homogenous thinking. Senior people need to understand the power of diversity to expand audience, not rely on the same ‘bankable’ names.”*

– Industry influencer

## 2.2.1 ADDRESSING INDUSTRY PRACTICES

Overall, there was consensus among employers that the current focus on diversity was having a noticeable impact on behaviour and practice by those hiring and developing people from under-represented groups. For example, employers reported that broadcasters and commissioners now require a more formal recruitment process, and cited evidence of wider recruitment policies from independent production companies. However, many industry representatives felt that more could be done to open out recruitment and to challenge unconscious bias.

There was also much agreement among film, television and games industry employers about ways of addressing some of the industry practices that could lead to structural barriers. Employers and industry representatives, although acknowledging the power of the wider policy changes, felt that it would be helpful to join up or align the different targets and policies across different commissioning and investment bodies. They felt the implications of implementing the policies needed to be better supported ‘on the ground’.

Some employers stressed the importance of a holistic view being the overall goal, rather than separate diversity ‘silos’ for different under-represented groups. Others felt that the differing nature of the groups meant that they each require a bespoke approach.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

BAFTA, Creative Skillset and BFI welcome this research which, in identifying success factors for particular individuals from under-represented groups, also highlights barriers that these groups face when seeking access into, and progression in, the UK screen industries. By focusing on those who have been more successful, the research aims to provide insights to others embarking on that same journey, as well as to potential employers and collaborators.

The research highlights that individuals from under-represented groups who have managed to sustain careers in the film, television or games industry tend to be the exception rather than the rule, and they often have to go above and beyond what is expected from their peers. A culture that values ‘fitting in’ and ‘who you know’ remains a major barrier to increasing diversity and needs to be challenged in a concerted and consistent way. However, there are employers within these industries who do recognise the role they have to play in addressing the issue. BAFTA, Creative Skillset and the BFI are committed to championing the benefits of a diverse workforce in our engagement with employers across film, television and games.

Although in most instances, the lessons learned and insights offered from this research are universal – in that they are primarily centred on the opportunity to develop beneficial relationships through networking with potential employers/hirers, collaborators, mentors or champions – for individuals from under-represented groups this activity may conflict with parental responsibilities, social or cultural practices, and/or the biases – both conscious and unconscious – of others.

This suggests that organisations such as BAFTA, Creative Skillset and the BFI, as well as other leading organisations across these sectors, need to provide the support and access that facilitates the building of these relationships at every stage of a career.

#### COMBINED ACTIVITY

BAFTA and the BFI will work together on a coordinated talent development scheme for emerging to mid-level talent, based on the BAFTA Crew model of live and online masterclasses, complemented by networking. ‘BFI NETWORK X BAFTA Crew’ will bring ‘below-the-line’ professionals together with emerging writers and directors, as well as providing insights from BAFTA members, winners and nominees. We will proactively seek individuals from under-represented groups to participate in the initiative.

#### BAFTA ACTIVITY

BAFTA believes that, through hearing from successful women, disabled people, those from BAME groups, or from a lower socio-economic background, we have an opportunity to not only celebrate their achievements against the odds, but to learn from their experiences, and to share those learnings with the wider film, television and games industries for the benefit of all, whether as a ‘worker’ or a ‘hirer’. Many individuals from under-represented groups are already doing this for themselves, and BAFTA can help to encourage and amplify this.

Current BAFTA activity aims to:

- actively encourage individuals from under-represented groups to apply for BAFTA membership and other networking, support and showcasing opportunities, including BAFTA Crew, BAFTA Breakthrough Brits and the BAFTA Roccliffe New Writing competition. By virtue of a fair and open recruitment process, the new and emerging talent we feature is very diverse. BAFTA-supported new talent are also paired with established professionals from our network who can support their career development;
- ensure our juries are made up of a diverse range of individuals;
- promote all BAFTA events to organisations that can reach a diverse range of practitioners;
- help anyone who is new to the industries to access industry expertise, regardless of their circumstance or background. Through our events and online channel, BAFTA Guru, we help them to learn from and meet some of the best experts in the industry;
- specifically target individuals from under-represented groups as speakers at industry-focused BAFTA debates and masterclasses, and as contributors on BAFTA Guru.

Planned new activity will:

- add the BFI Diversity Standards to the eligibility criteria for the Outstanding British Film and Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer categories of the Film Awards from 2019. We will put measures in place through our events and initiatives to help British productions meet the Standards;

- work with industry bodies, broadcasters and the games sector to run ‘crewing up’ sessions to introduce heads of departments and talent managers to talented individuals from under-represented groups;
- initiate craft-specific talks and networking events for BAFTA members, mid-level professionals and emerging talent, and actively seek out and encourage individuals from under-represented groups to participate, in order to encourage informal mentoring relationships;
- support women directors who are ready to work in film or high-end television with a targeted programme of networking and support. The learnings from this scheme will be shared with other emerging directors;
- provide career coaching to mid-level professionals, and promote this to individuals from under-represented groups.

## CREATIVE SKILLSET ACTIVITY

Creative Skillset is currently working with the BFI to develop a new 10-year skills framework, which will run from April 2017. Diversity will be at the heart of this new strategy as it will focus on creating new opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds from across the UK. This will build upon the successes of the current film skills strategy, which has been encouraging diversity through education, entry routes, employment and executive level. Some examples supported by Creative Skillset include:

### Executive

This six-month BAME Leadership programme, delivered by Short Courses@NFTS, creates a bespoke offering for six emerging executives working within film. The aim is to nurture the next generation of stand-out, senior talent. The cohort undertakes an intensive programme of training, coaching and mentoring, in order to develop participants’ knowledge and understanding of the film industry while also building their leadership skills.

‘Animated Women UK Career Development Mentoring Programme’ combines career development workshops with industry masterclasses and mentoring, targeting women at both early and senior career stages working in the technical areas of animation and VFX. A group of senior women act as mentors for women in the early stages of their career but, unlike conventional 1:1 mentoring, where the mentor is the ‘giver’, these mentors will also have development support from their peers. The two groups of women will meet together separately and then as a whole group to share learning and insights.

## Employment

Hiive ([www.hiive.co.uk](http://www.hiive.co.uk)) is a professional online network for the creative industries, set up by Creative Skillset, targeting companies, course providers and professionals at any stage in their creative career. In an industry built on relationships, Hiive makes it easier for people from different backgrounds to build their networks, promote their skills and find opportunities.

Missing in Action Training deliver a slate of training programmes, including ‘Filmonomics 4’, a business-training programme for filmmakers on the cusp of their first feature who are female and/or of BAME origin. The programme offers a bridge across the gap between the creative and commercial aspects of film, mixing industry expertise with networking and mentoring alongside a focus on trends and future developments. The programme also provides sessions on developing confidence and handling failure and rejection.

## Entry

104 films deliver a number of schemes aimed at disabled filmmakers. This includes the ‘Neurodiverse Film Talent Development Programme’ driven by their experience of producing *Dawn of the Dark Fox*, the first feature film directed by an autistic director.

Apprenticeships can provide excellent opportunities for new entrants from diverse backgrounds to ‘earn while they learn’ and find pathways into the creative industries. However, there are a number of barriers to making them work within these sectors given the predominance of short-term project working and high levels of freelancing. Creative Skillset is working with industry partners to set up an Apprenticeship Training Agency, employing apprentices who will be placed across a number of organisations and productions.

## BFI ACTIVITY (IN ITS OWN WORDS):

The BFI recognises the need to address diversity and inclusion and we are pleased that we have embedded the opportunity and access this report shows to be fundamental into our decision-making process with our Diversity Standards. In developing our new organisational strategy for the 2017–2022 period, we spoke to stakeholders and individuals across the UK, who confirmed the importance of positive action to improve diversity and inclusion in the screen workforce.

Our strategy, published in November 2016, aims to directly address these challenges. To bring promotion of diversity and inclusion to the core of activity – providing more opportunities for those from under-represented groups to see, learn about

and seek a career in film and the screen sectors and in activity that we support. The findings from our recently commissioned Skills Audit show that there are real areas of skills gaps within the industry and, as well as targeting under-represented groups, our strategy outlines actions to ensure that such opportunities are increasingly available across the entire UK, providing opportunity and support regardless of location or background.

How the BFI will drive change:

- Diversity is at the heart of our 2022 Strategy and from 2017 we will have dedicated resources in place to support delivery of this work.
- We will continue to embed our Diversity Standards and our 2022 Strategy commits to create the conditions to allow all productions to adopt them voluntarily by 2022.
- We will also be partnering much more closely with organisations within the diversity sphere, such as Race for Equality, The Gender Equality Campaign and Stonewall.
- We will shape the compelling arguments for diversity in the screen industry.
- We have also committed by 2022, to devolving 25% of all BFI production funding to decision-makers based outside London to help locally based talent to develop careers and to tell stories in and of their region.

How the BFI will nurture talent and developing skills:

- BFI NETWORK is aimed at emerging filmmakers from across the UK who we know are the next generation of talent. It offers 15 UK writers and directors to participate in masterclasses, screenings, events and one to one meetings with industry professionals.
- In 2016, NETWORK aligned with BFI's Black Star Blockbuster season. All participants were black, Asian and minority ethnic filmmakers; a demonstration of BFI's commitment to positive action.
- Participants received accreditation for the entire duration of the 2016 BFI London Film Festival.
- BFI is proud that Jacked, a short film from London Calling 2015, supported by the BFI NETWORK won the award for best short film at the 2016 British Independent Film Awards (BIFA). The team behind Jacked have since gone on to bigger projects – Rene Pannevis and Jennifer Eriksson are currently working on their feature film Looted, which was commissioned through Microwave. Meanwhile, Ashish Ghadiali, who wrote the screenplay for Jacked and also wrote and directed Love in a Time of Death through London Calling Plus in 2015, was nominated for the BIFA for Best Documentary for The Confession: Living the War on Terror.
- We will continue to support and invest in BFI NETWORK to ensure that our talented participants are able to progress within the industry.

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## FOOTNOTES

- 1 The study was led by a team of independent research consultants: Helen North, Kate O'Connor, Karen Muir and Hilary Carty.
- 2 Creative Skillset Employment Survey 2015:  
[creativeskillset.org/assets/0002/0952/2015\\_Creative\\_Skillset\\_Employment\\_Survey\\_-\\_March\\_2016\\_Summary.pdf](https://creativeskillset.org/assets/0002/0952/2015_Creative_Skillset_Employment_Survey_-_March_2016_Summary.pdf)
- 3 Creative Skillset Creative Media Workforce Survey 2014  
[creativeskillset.org/assets/0001/0465/Creative\\_Skillset\\_Creative\\_Media\\_Workforce\\_Survey\\_2014.pdf](https://creativeskillset.org/assets/0001/0465/Creative_Skillset_Creative_Media_Workforce_Survey_2014.pdf)
- 4 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) individuals were not included as a distinct group in this research, due to the need to create a manageable sample for meaningful analysis. However, LGBT practitioners could be included in future research.
- 5 From the report Social Capital and Networks in Film and TV: Jobs for the boys, British Sociological Conference 2012. "One focus puller with a wife and two small children reported going from an annual income of £48,000 to an income of £6,000 for two years when he was trying to make the leap to being a director of photography."