

Bectu, Bournemouth University and Viva la PD: State of Play Survey Worker's Testimonies

Some of these responses have been lightly edited for clarity, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Recruitment Practices

“It’s the Wild West! No responses after promises of jobs, outrageously illegal questions at interviews. It’s as if employee rights don’t exist in the industry.”

“I think the lack of professional management in recruitment processes causes unnecessary stress and uncertainty. I am often not told - even after an interview - if I don’t get the Job. I am left to slowly realise when they don’t get in touch. This is unacceptable. I feel the informal nature of reference giving is ripe for unfairness and were it recorded, would lead to legal action in many cases.

I think the contracts we are made to sign are one sided and unfair. Contracts should be standardised in the freelancers favour or at least to ensure a standard set of terms and conditions”

“There is too much emphasis on exactly matching skills and not enough on actually looking overall at candidates. Nobody seems to understand transferable skills exist and apply to most work in the industry. There are too many companies who put up job ads and then don't follow up because a friend comes free and is available. There is way too much elitism and buddies giving mates jobs.”

Management Practices

“People in management roles have never had management training. There is also a lot of unconscious bias going on the industry. I’ve often felt pushed out because I’m a POC and have considered leaving tv altogether due to negative experiences”

Lack of Career Development

“Unfortunately I find that because of the freelance nature of our industry, there is very little 'investment' in helping people improve and develop within jobs. It's rare to have anything as official as a feedback session on how people have done during a job / how they could improve / what they did well AND could have done better. It’s much more common to hear whispers about someone (it could be any position from runner, to edit producer, or PD) and how they aren't great. The last person to actually hear these criticisms is the person themselves - who would have the most to gain from the feedback! It usually means that individuals are never given the chance to either answer for themselves against criticisms, or more importantly the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and improve.

The unfortunate result is that after that job is over, their reputation could well be damaged, without them even knowing.

A more formal attitude to on the job feedback and even an open 'wash-up' discussion after productions finish would really help."

Culture of Bullying and Effects on Mental Health

"I'm leaving the industry after twenty years. Had enough of bad practices. e.g. Bullying execs, relentless criticism, toxic working environments, stress, long working hours, not feeling valued, bad effect on my own mental health. No career development possibilities, no security."

"Bullying, harassment, micro management, a culture of presenteeism and a culture of fear, which leads to backstabbing between colleagues. Ageism. Sexism. An expectation that you will pull out the stops at all times and work late to get the work done, regardless of home commitments. Otherwise you aren't seen as fully committed. Also there is no downtime - emails at 11pm at night 7am in the morning, over the weekend, it never ends. I also had my flexible working hours 'removed' when I was on maternity leave. It felt like a motherhood 'penalty' and made my job untenable in the end. I was pitted against someone else for a promotion but couldn't apply for the job as it was advertised as full time despite my boss who also had a young child working part time. The worst culprits are at the bigger organisations who hide behind bureaucratic systems when it suits them. Bad management nearly led me to leave TV, my mental health was so badly affected I lost all confidence and am only just getting back to normal."

Lack of Broadcaster Responsibility to Freelancers

"I think the only way these issues can be solved are if broadcasters collectively take responsibility for them and drive the change. Production companies vary in size, experience and financial muscle - they are essentially freelancers themselves - vulnerable to the whims of commissioners, budget lines and continuous "fat trimming" budget cuts. In a decentralised freelance market, there's little gain for production companies to invest in short term staff training and bigger and better HR and production management (that would be required to make sure hiring and worker payments was done perfectly and fairly). And when productions are as fleeting and temporary as the people that come together to make them - the ability to invest in forward planning and freelance infrastructure just isn't there. Freelancers and Production Companies are in this together - over regulate PC's without giving them the backing they need from the broadcasters and both suffer. The broadcasters need to take more responsibility for all THEIR staff if things are to get better. It's also in their interests to - freelancers usually work with the same broadcasters more than they do with the same PC - so the broadcasters would be investing in themselves and stopping the ongoing brain drain."

"Time & money - more of both for pre, production and post. Budgets are being squeezed and squeezed each year, with less people to do more work. The standard of content produced does not go down. Commissioners and broadcasters should be more involved - they should have a responsibility to the people making their programming, a duty of care and be more accountable for the budgets and commissions they sign off on. It is difficult because production companies who get the commissions are separate legal entities so either productions go back to being made in house at broadcasters or indies need to be monitored in some way to ensure better working practices, and it should be an easy process for any employee or freelancer to ensure their rights are implemented."

There needs to be a system where production companies are sanctioned appropriately if they do not look after their employees and freelancers.”

Late Commissioning of Programmes

“As an SP I always start the job on the back foot, inevitably it’s already late in the schedule and you have to start off at breakneck speed. You therefore have to recruit quickly and urgently and I worry that less obvious candidates, for diversity, for example don’t get picked up because they take more time to find. I hate the fact that everything in television is last minute and stressful and you get the best you can in the time, but not the most diverse or those who need a little more support. As I’ve got older and wiser I can see this is a problem which won’t be fixed unless broadcasters commission with more prep time and raise the budgets accordingly. Which they won’t. So it’s catch 22.”

Duty of Care

“Earlier this year, I was sacked off a project at [NAME OF COMPANY REMOVED] because I had a breast cancer scare. Unfortunately I had a huge lump, had to take some time off for hospital appointments, was very worried as my mum had breast cancer so I was high risk. The company used inexperienced edit assistants to cover me whilst I was off. The end result was the program needed more time on it to get it up to scratch. But there was no empathy or understanding from the exec or company and they sacked me off the booking. Even though I was facing a potentially fatal health diagnosis. Thankfully I got the all clear but I was then left feeling depressed for quite a long time after being treated so badly by the company.”