



Let's fix it in post

Why broadcasters and production companies can and should address human rights risks in post production



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Executive summary

Post production is an essential part of making all TV shows, sitting between (and sometimes overlapping) production and transmission. It includes data storage, editing, picture grading, visual effects (VFX), sound, quality control and mastering. Post production is a combination of both highly artistic and technical roles, sometimes done by the same individuals.

Broadcasters and production companies depend on good post production, without which they cannot complete their shows. They also have a responsibility under international human rights frameworks, and increasingly under legislation as well, to take responsibility for human rights risks to workers in their supply chains and to prevent, mitigate and remedy any impacts.

Human rights are basic minimum standards which belong to every individual and which were first set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948. They include the right to health, the right to non-discrimination and the right to just and favourable conditions of work, amongst others. In the UK, they are legally protected through the Human Rights Act (1998), as well as legislation such as the Equality Act (2010) and the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974). This research has taken a human rights lens to post production, using an international human rights framework to identify human rights risks in the way that post production takes place. Any broadcaster claiming to respect human rights should consider the findings and recommendations of this report.

Summary of findings

The research found that those working in post production have their human rights adversely impacted in a range of different and sometimes very troubling ways, and that the responsibility for these impacts often sits with commissioners and productions.

1. In terms of labour rights, the research found widespread examples of **illegal or barely legal practices**¹ including lack of contracts, below minimum wage work, inappropriate payment terms, non-compliance with health and safety regulations and a failure to make reasonable adjustments.
2. Due to current shortages of available work and the large number of people who are self-employed or on fixed term contracts, the sector is riddled with **insecurity**, causing high levels of stress for those finding work and leading some to accept poor terms or working conditions. Those that do have work are grateful or expected to be grateful, even when that work does not meet any reasonable definitions of ‘decent’ or ‘good’.²
3. There is a lack of formal recruitment processes, employment practices, training and career paths. Post production roles may be hired by productions, contracted by post production facilities or subcontracted through companies and individuals, creating **disparities and lack of transparency over employment relationships** and where duty of care lies.

¹ Self-employed workers are not currently entitled to minimum wage and other protections for contracted workers, but the line between worker and self-employment is grey

² See for example *Job quality in the Creative Industries*, by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (2023)

4. Insecurity is also a driver of **bullying and blame culture**, with blame frequently pushed down the chain to junior roles, while the fragmented hiring practices and widely freelance nature of the sector means that there is a lack of clear management, accountability or channels for reporting issues.
5. Post production conditions involve **poor labour practices**, including excessively long working hours, a lack of rest days, high pressure to deliver, insufficient breaks, a lack of daylight (especially in winter), working in small, dark and airless rooms and an expectation to remain available when projects are postponed.
6. These working conditions also impact on the **health, safety and family lives** of those working in post production. Interviewees reported being unable to make healthcare appointments, experiencing repetitive injuries, lacking opportunities for healthy eating, driving home after long shifts when exhausted and being unable to establish and maintain relationships with family and friends. Some felt that working in post production was **incompatible with having children**.
7. Those experiencing poor working conditions reported feeling **unable to raise concerns** because of fears of blacklisting in an industry that relies heavily on word of mouth, damage to their reputations if they are seen as not coping, a lack of clarity about how to raise concerns and an expectation that nothing will change.

While some experiences are the same as those working in other parts of production, there are some unique aspects of post production that compound issues and make them particularly challenging or different.

- Work in post production tends to be done by individuals or in very small teams (with the exception of some VFX work), and also often in small rooms. This makes it harder to organise; harder for people to know what a realistic workload is or what basic minimum standards should be; harder to call out poor behaviour; and leaves people more prone to intimidation. With fewer opportunities for camaraderie or communications between workers, together with a different physical space from the production office, there are greater risks of isolation and loneliness.
- Post production also happens at the end of the TV making process and the sector must often make do with whatever budget or time is left over, rather than having adequate amounts ringfenced.
- Current budgetary pressures are leading to underbidding by post production facilities fearful of losing work, and with few options to deliver profitably without resorting to exploitative labour practices.

Many of the issues identified result from the way that commissioners and productions operate.

- The initial schedule is sometimes unrealistic in terms of its expectations; for other projects it is the delays or last-minute changes to the schedule that results in problems for those working in post.
- Late decisions, notes and approvals from commissioners can have significant knock-on impacts for post production workers and make tight budgets even more challenging. Such impacts are rarely acknowledged by those responsible.
- Poor communication and consideration for those in post production can result in last minute cancellations or the failure to provide appropriate warning and support for those working with traumatic or sensitive content.

- Late payments from the commissioner or production company can lead to delays in payments to freelancers.

These issues seem to stem from a combination of limited understanding as to what post production involves, a lack of transparency in relation to projects, and a general lack of understanding, consideration or care for the consequences of actions and decisions, which end up being felt most by those with very little agency for the way projects are planned and executed.

In conclusion, producers, directors and commissioners can adversely impact post production workers through a range of factors: their demands for work that is cheap, fast and high quality; poor budgeting and purchasing practices; and their failure to require and monitor good practices of post production suppliers. The results are the problematic working practices described in this research; the significant impact on family life experienced by those working in post production; and the substantial impediments to a diverse workforce, to the detriment of creative achievement.

The approach used is not cost effective: poor planning and inadequate communications waste time; and long hours and unhealthy working environments reduce productivity. At the same time, budgets appear to be shrinking while demand for quality stays constant, suggesting that broadcasters are not bearing the true costs of their productions. In practice, this means that some of those costs are increasingly borne by individuals least able to afford it who end up providing their labour below cost or for free.

Summary of recommendations

Fixing the situation in post production will require systemic change and an industry-wide approach. There is a need and an opportunity for broadcasters and production companies to lead this change by:

1. increasing the understanding of post production processes among commissioners and production teams;
2. resetting expectations on the amount of budget and time required to meet demands for high quality work, together with acknowledgement of and responsibility for financial and resource implications of late changes; and
3. changing their own practices in order to incentivise and enable better working conditions so that the post production industry can thrive. This includes committing to prompt payment, rewarding post production facilities that have good working practices and supporting better diversity monitoring of post production workers.

There are also opportunities for post production facilities to improve the situation by:

1. providing structured training opportunities and paths for progression;
2. proactively addressing stigma around accessing mental health support;
3. ensuring written contracts and prompt payment for freelancers; and
4. being proactive in reducing the working hours of all those involved in projects.

Together, broadcasters, production companies and post facilities should work with industry bodies to:

1. clarify job descriptions and career paths in post;
2. support an industry-wide channel to report poor working conditions; and
3. provide training opportunities on management, business skills and self-care.

Summary of human rights risks in post production

Potentially affected group	Issues identified in this research	Human rights at risk	Potential causes
All workers	Excessively long working hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work Right to rest and leisure Right to health Right to family life 	Schedule, budget, limited understanding of processes, late/ unrealistic demands, poor equipment, industry norms, lack of planning
All workers	Insufficient rest days: inability to attend medical appointments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to health Right to non discrimination 	Schedule, industry norms
All workers	Insufficient rest days: exhaustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to rest and leisure Right to health Right to family life 	Schedule, industry norms,
All workers	Insufficient breaks: unhealthy eating, repetitive injuries and mental health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to health 	Long working hours, industry norms
All workers	Lack of warning about sensitive or traumatic footage and lack of follow up support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to health 	Poor communications; lack of transparency
All workers	Lack of ergonomic equipment, causing injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to health 	Budget, lack of diversity
All workers	Fear of raising concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to justice 	Lack of lines of accountability; lack of channels or process to raise concerns; reliance on word of mouth for work
All workers, especially those working with one or two others at a time	Bullying behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work Right to health 	Insecurity, hierarchies, norms, lack of management training for those in roles that include managing others, fear of raising concerns
All workers, especially junior roles	Blame culture where accountability is not taken by those in senior positions but passed down to junior roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work Right to health 	Insecurity, fear, lack of management training for those in roles that include managing others
Freelancers ³	Lack of contracts leading to last minute cancellations, ghosting, no overtime payments and no right of remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work 	Lack of financial and business skills; among artists; gratitude, fear, precarity
Freelancers	Expectation of availability, sudden changes to schedules, including hiatus or extra work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to work Right to just and favourable conditions of work 	Schedule, industry norms, fear of raising concerns, lack of contracts
Freelancers	Poor payment terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work Right to health 	Lack of prompt payment, from commissioners downwards
Freelancers and junior roles	Accepting below minimum wage work or working for free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work 	Gratitude, fear, precarity

³ Note that the term ‘freelancers’ used in this report is taken to mean self-employed sole traders and those trading through Limited Liability Companies without employees. Those on fixed term contracts (sometimes known as “PAYE freelancers”) are treated as a distinct group as they experience a different set of vulnerabilities.

Potentially affected group	Issues identified in this research	Human rights at risk	Potential causes
People working on 6-day fixed term contracts	Workers told not to work weekends and then told that those weekend days count towards their holiday allowance, which they have therefore already used up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to rest and leisure Right to just and favourable conditions of work 	Schedule
Workers in roles only advertised on social media	Inability to avoid unhealthy social media networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to health Right to work 	Schedule, industry norms
Junior and mid-level roles	Unclear avenues for progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to non discrimination Right to just and favourable conditions of work 	Informal career paths and progression opportunities; ill-defined roles
Runners and junior roles	Very low paid entry level roles that are only open to those with other means of support and to those physically able to do runner tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to non discrimination 	Industry norms
Studio / facility workers	Late night finishes: safety getting home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to life 	Schedule, long working hours
Remote/hybrid workers	Inadequate equipment, poorly defined working hours and fewer training opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work Right to rest and leisure 	
Workers in machine rooms	Work often takes place in small, airless, dark rooms with inadequate temperature control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to health 	Budget, Industry norms
Workers on set (esp. client-side VFX)	Safety of post production workers on production sets or locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to life 	Lack of training and support
Disabled workers	Lack of reasonable adjustments, inaccessible post production facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to non-discrimination Right to work 	Lack of diversity (esp. in senior roles), lack of awareness, lack of management training
Female workers	Misogyny and sexual harassment		
Workers from a minority ethnic background	Racism		
Outsourced workers	Poor working conditions that are hidden and sometimes highly exploitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to just and favourable conditions of work Right to rest and leisure Right to health 	Budget, industry norms and business models
Subjects, participants and contributors	Privacy risks if pre-edited footage is shared or used for other purposes by workers, especially intimate or personal footage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to privacy 	Lack of standard safeguards
Participants and contributors; post production workers	Safety risks if identities of whistleblowers / informants are known to workers, in case they experience retaliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to life 	Lack of standard safeguards

