

HELP NOTES

# Getting In, Getting On



Work in the creative industries is organised around a range of staff and freelance positions; an increase in project work means that freelancers often move from one short-term engagement to another. This flexible, adaptable and successful workforce thrives on teamwork and great communication. Read on for some pointers to help you to understand the creative workplace.

[www.creativetoolkit.org.uk](http://www.creativetoolkit.org.uk)

# HELP NOTES: Getting In, Getting On

## DO YOU QUALIFY?

Let's be clear – there are no set routes into the creative industries. In many creative businesses, employers will not require qualifications and prefer to employ people with practical experience and useful skills. However, a qualification could be the thing that makes you stand out to an employer if:

- it's in a subject that will benefit their project, or
- the role requires specific technical knowledge



Regardless of qualifications, everyone is expected to have good English and communication skills. This includes spelling, grammar and punctuation.

It's important to remember too that study will take some years and for most will lead to financial debt. Once you've graduated it may be some time before you secure employment and begin to repay the debt. Qualifications will not entitle you to walk into a highly paid job; you'll have to start at the bottom with low paid work in just the same way as someone who chooses not to pursue higher education.

## What to expect in an interview

If you have been for a job interview in a non-creative company, you probably won't be expecting the generally informal nature of an interview in the creative sector. Despite this you should prepare appropriately. Research the company and inform yourself about who they are and what they do. There's unlikely to be a test but preparation will help you to ask questions during the interview.

Interviews will often be held in meeting rooms but equally could be in the employer's office at their desk or in a local coffee shop. It could be just one person you meet with, or a panel of people. Regardless of the environment, you are expected to act professionally. For much more on interview preparation, read *Succeeding At Interview*, another in the series of Creative Toolkit Help Notes which you'll find here: [www.creativetoolkit.org.uk/help-notes](http://www.creativetoolkit.org.uk/help-notes)

## Understanding the employment relationship

Going to work is not like going to college or university. How you perform your tasks, communicate and work with others will be judged by your colleagues. Opinions will be formed on your ability to do your job and these will impact on your future employability. The creative sector encourages personal recommendation within recruitment and past performance will guide your future.

On leaving education you are most likely to be hired in junior jobs with reduced responsibility; however remember, your role is still vital. Generally speaking, you'll report to one person and there may be others fulfilling positions at the same level as you or working in the same role. There will also be people more senior to you. They will have more responsibility. It should be made clear to you who your seniors are – if not, you should ask the person you report to ie your 'line manager'. Although creative employers tend to be more relaxed in comparison to others, there are often unspoken boundaries that should be observed. Watch your colleagues working practices and study how they engage with others.

## DON'T:

- be over familiar
- leave your work for someone else to do – you have been hired to do it
- bring your personal life into the office
- use company resources for private matters
- fib on your CV – you will be found out and judged unfavourably
- do not speak ill of the company/your job to outside parties (contributors, clients, experts etc).

## Social Media at Work

Most creative employers accept that staff will use social media platforms to aid their work. It is acknowledged that social media works due to personal connections. However, it is important to recognise the boundary between personal and professional use of social media.

Increasingly, employers will have a social media policy in place and it is your responsibility to familiarise yourself with it at each place of work. If the policy isn't clear – or if there isn't one in place – ask your line manager for guidance on what is appropriate.

When you're working you need to be aware of the impact of your status updates. It sounds like common sense but you would be surprised how often an innocently intended status update causes unfavourable repercussions. For example, imagine this conversation:

*Producer:* "Everyone – Mark just called in sick, he won't be in today. Karen, could you check with him what needs doing urgently today and get it done please?"

*Runner:* "Yeah, not surprised to hear that. His facebook status at 4am says he's wasted and continuing to party"

*Producer:* "Does it indeed? May I see that please?"

You can imagine the consequences of that scenario...

Similarly, sharing pictures, locations, guest lineups etc without authorisation can cause serious problems for press strategies and can get you into a heap of trouble with your employer and their client.

Check what's acceptable with your employer and then if you are using a social media platform to assist with your work, make sure your colleagues are aware of this to avoid any misunderstandings. Generally speaking, personal use of social media is tolerated during lunch breaks and after work.

## DO:

- check the social media use policy in the company

# HELP NOTES: Getting In, Getting On

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- lock down your online security so that sensitive personal information is not freely available
- take care with comments or information which could defame your employer or compromise your work or reputation. During your engagement you are a representative of the company that has hired you and you must act appropriately.

## EMPLOYMENT BASICS Contracts

When you accept a new position, depending on the role and the company, you should be given a job description which describes the tasks you will be expected to do. Details may also be communicated to you verbally.

A contract should set out the terms agreed between you and the employer and set out your and your employer's responsibilities. Essentially, the employer engages you to fulfil a role for them and you agree to perform in this role and deliver the agreed work for an agreed sum of money, to an agreed schedule.

Contract terms will be determined by your position. It's your responsibility to take care to read the contract carefully before signing it. If there is anything you don't understand, or something you would not agree to, within it – you must clarify it with your line manager in a timely manner to get the issue resolved. Employers are obliged to provide a written statement of terms within eight weeks of employment but it is possible that your engagement will be shorter.

If your contract is based on a verbal agreement it's good practice to send an email to the employer setting out what you understand the main points to be; include points like the name of the project, the company, the dates of the engagement, agreed hours, rate of pay and your position. This will serve as a record for your future reference and as a reminder to the employer.

Remember: even if the contract is not set out formally in writing by the employer a contract is still binding if you are able to prove you were engaged to produce work for an

employer on the understanding you would be paid for it.

### DO:

- Always check with your line manager what is expected of you
- Read and understand your contract; ask for assistance with anything you do not understand
- Use your contract terms to negotiate any positive changes where your employer wants to adjust your role or responsibilities.

### Payment

Ensure you are paid to the terms of your agreed contract/agreement. It is your responsibility to check you have been paid and to chase up delayed payment.

Most entry level roles are recognised as PAYE (where the company deducts tax and national insurance contributions direct from your salary and sends these sums to the authorities for you). Your line manager should require you to fill out forms with your bank and national insurance information so that you can be paid correctly. You will also need to bring your current P45 (or ask them for a P46 form to fill out) so that your tax payments can be worked out for you.

Later on in your career, particularly if you work in film or TV, you may elect to be recognised as self-employed but you must check with HMRC's (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) special film and TV tax office, to see whether your role meets the criteria. Check the Business for Freelances Help Notes at [www.creativetoolkit.org.uk/help-notes](http://www.creativetoolkit.org.uk/help-notes)

### DO:

- Check the date payment is expected to reach your account
- Check that payment has been received when expected
- Call your line manager to follow up any errors.

### Health and Safety

All employers are required to have a H&S policy. It must be issued to you but it is your responsibility to read it thoroughly and to understand it. It should inform you of the procedure in case of accidents and may supply useful contact numbers.

Within the company, each project is likely to produce its own risk assessment. The most senior person on the team will assess the issues likely to be faced (hazards) and will design measures to be taken by the team to reduce the associated risks. The project manager will work with the senior person to sign off the risk assessment. A document will be produced and circulated to the team. It will describe what actions will be taken to reduce risk. Once again it is your responsibility to read, absorb and act on the information relevant to your role and/or your position within the team.

### Training

Due to the transient and informal nature of many creative businesses, employers often do not invest in training freelance workers. You are your own business and it is your responsibility to invest in your own formal training. You will receive training on the job, just by being guided by your line manager and observing your colleagues. Listen to how they communicate effectively and observe the work they produce – try to emulate the best examples.

All training should be beneficial to your employability but it's often hard to find the cash or the time during engagements. If you want to progress, you should look into short courses, seminars or workshops that will be of benefit. Some of them will be after work hours or at the weekend and can even be free if you meet certain criteria. BECTU, ScreenSkills (formerly Creative Skillset and Indie Training Fund), popular industry blogs and social media groups are good sources of information and opportunities.

### DO:

- Check what the course will actually deliver
- Check the fees payable – do they sound reasonable for the content/do the fees reflect the experience of the trainer?
- Do some research on the person delivering the course – does their background fit with the course they are advertising?
- What is the cancellation policy? Can you get a full or partial refund if you can't attend?

# HELP NOTES: Getting In, Getting On

## Managing your ambition

As mentioned at the start of these notes, past performance is key to future career development. Everything you learn on the job and with additional complementary training will increase your employability and help you to progress.

It is in your personal interests to be the best you can be in the role you are hired for. You will start at the bottom in the most junior position and it's the best place to be! You are fully involved in the project with limited responsibility and can get involved in lots of different areas before you decide what you really want to do. It's often true that people change their mind about their career path once they actually start working and see what the job involves.

Trying to leap forward into a more senior position, before you have much experience, will put you in a difficult situation as you won't have the knowledge needed to handle the range of situations particular to that role. Take your time to learn as much as you can in your current role. Learn from your colleagues and develop working relationships with employers and fellow freelancers. It will be far easier to secure future work when you have a good reputation as being thorough, competent and professional. Wouldn't it be brilliant to be able to choose which projects you want to work on when you have many employers wanting your services, based on your good reputation?

### DO:

- Treat work as a stage (especially important for new entrants)
- Ask, enquire, offer, show initiative, extend yourself;
- Make the opportunity work for you by securing good references;
- Keep a log of tasks undertaken to inform your CV update.

## Networking

Networking. The evil nemesis of every freelance in a creative business... or is it? Networking is about making connections with people who may want to employ you. It doesn't have to be onerous. Due to the casual, and often

informal, nature of creative industries networking is of paramount importance in your bid for future employment.

### So how do we do it?

- **Tea making!** Yes, seriously. Strike up conversations in the kitchen of your workplace. Introduce yourself and what you are working on. Ask colleagues what they do in the course of the conversation. Say hello when you see them around.
- **Go to the pub after work:** With your work colleagues of course, not by yourself. You don't have to stay long and you don't even have to have a drink. Have a non-work related chat with people on your project. Chances are, there will be other people from different projects within the same company there too. Same drill as in the kitchen – introduce yourself!
- **Use your social media** to connect with your colleagues. Heed the warnings in the previous social media bit about oversharing personal information or make it easy by only connecting once you've left a project. Looking for work? Update your status to reflect your availability.
- **Go to all the workshops, seminars, events you can.** Creative industries are smaller than you think they are. Events are the perfect way to re-connect with people you will randomly and unexpectedly bump into. Suggest catching up at a later date or connect with them on social media. Trade business cards if you haven't seen them for a while and they aren't in your social media network.
- Join groups and participate in conversations for your industry online. Follow social media accounts and blogs that signpost opportunities and official company accounts. They will often publish links to employment/networking opportunities. Entry level regional jobs in creative industries are often published by Twitter users and posts are filled incredibly quickly on fast moving mediums.

### KEY TIPS

- Introduced to someone or meeting them again but can't really remember who they are? Extend your hand and introduce yourself

and what you do. If they know who you are, they will tell you so. If they don't – you have saved them from embarrassment for not remembering you and feeling bad about it.

- If you remember where you have met them before - mention it, it may jog a memory for them but don't be offended if they still don't know who you are.
- Being approached by a stranger at a public event is often scary but namedropping a mutual friend at the start of conversation, will make things easier. Be observant to the other person's reaction when you namedrop and act accordingly.
- Someone you don't know approaches you and seems to know who you are? Don't be scared to say, 'I'm terribly sorry – have we met before? I can't remember your name, please remind me where I know you from'.

### DON'T:

- Expect instant results.
- Thrust your card into the face of someone you don't know and have been only speaking with for five minutes. They are unlikely to call you for work if they feel their personal space was invaded aggressively.
- Force someone to continue talking to you if you can see they are trying to get away.
- Be offended that someone doesn't want your business card or connect with you on social media platforms. People often prefer to have met/worked with people they connect with online. It's not personal.

Now, none of these sounds too hard, right? It's likely you already do most of this without realising you are doing it. Now you can start being more conscious of your low-effort but high impact networking that doesn't cost money, much of your time or effort, and is distinctly more pleasant than you might have been led to believe.

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