Careers in broadcasting

Pam Andrew, Careers Adviser, attended an AGCAS Scotland Creative Careers event on 13 August 2014 at the University of Strathclyde. Michael Hines, TV Director, presented this event. Michael is famous for directing ‘Still Game’. His most recent projects have included Belladrum and the new adverts for Tunnoch tea cakes. He directs single and multiple camera roles and teaches at UWS and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Here he gives a brief overview of information he considers important for those interested in a career in broadcasting.

1. Student needs to know about what companies do, recent programmes, staff who work on them, distribution etc. http://www.filmbang.com/ is a directory of all Scotland’s film and television companies, gives large amounts of useful information.

2. TV is divided into two main areas Fiction (soap operas, dramas etc) and Factual (news, documentary, panels) – students should know which attracts them.

3. Dream to Screen http://www.dreamtoscreen.org/about/ competition which gives five finalists funding, equipment and an experienced professional mentor to make a film. Encourage students to apply.

4. TV/Film can be divided into 3 main areas – Production, Above the Line (includes Producer and Director) and Resources (includes all the technical roles)
   a. Resources/Technical – start as camera assistant (approx. £100 a day) – move equipment, select lenses. Move onto focus puller – these are only in big productions (approx. £200 a day). Then Operator, Lighting Cameras and Director of Photography – in Scotland these three roles are normally combined.
   b. Resources/Sound – three roles- Boom Swinger, Mixer and Recordist (approximately £350 – £400 a day)
   c. Pre-production roles – Production Secretary – this is not creative – it looks at the business side of the production. Production Co-ordinator - co-ordinate the various groups and personnel that come together in filmmaking, can be a highly pressurised job. Production Manager – handles the finances. Next step up from Production Manager is the Producer you (can’t progress from PM to Director).
   d. Post Production Roles – several roles are available in Edit and Dubbing. Edit Assistants are often needed in Facilities Offices (provide TV/Film services). An Edit Assistant can be promoted to Editor. You start as an Assistant Dubber before becoming a Dubber.
   e. Fiction – the entry level post in Fiction is the Runner (£80 – £100 a day) – a “goffer” – does everything on set. It helps to have a driving licence; long hours usually start around 7.00am finish 8.00pm but may be later. Go from Runner to 3rd Runner then 2nd Runner finally 1st Runner. After that can go onto Assistant Director.
   f. Factual – start as Researcher (£600 a week) – lots of phoning and using the internet - works to the Producer’s needs. There are Specialist Factual Researchers for expert
presenters eg Coast. These researchers need to have a relevant background eg History/Geography graduates. Researchers can move to Assistant Producer – people in this role are hired and fired all the time, expected to be able to use a camera. Majority of APS stay in this career the next step is Producer then Series Producer then Executive Producer (at channel level)

g. Electrician Route - Spark – Health & Safety is very important in this role, involves lots of time spent hanging around. Next step if Gaffer (Chief Spark)

5. Encourage students to “go out and fail” – spend any spare time filming, trying things out – will learn from mistakes but will get better and be able to discuss equipment pros and cons. Important to understand “your gear”.

6. Current shortage in freelance technical staff.

7. Getting in – write to company who’s films/programmes you like to watch and ask for experience. If you don’t have a named contact address to “Head of Talent”. Make your letter stand out, highlight your experience.

8. CV – one page. Show examples of working on own initiative and being delegated work.

9. Knowledge – need to know about different roles and target application to duties of that role.” I am a camera assistant not a runner because …..” Need to know which role and write to appropriate area eg “Runners Pool”

10. Pay or not paid – offer to work free for a couple of days and if you’re any good at it then ask for wage.


12. Students with language skills – BBC Gaelic is always looking for translators

13. Other roles – huge services such as BBC and STV offer many other roles on offer such as accountants, IT professionals etc

14. Opportunities in Scotland – probably better chance of securing place/experience in Scotland but actors are advised to have agents in London and Manchester.

15. PACT, http://www.pact.co.uk, – provides useful information on tax guidelines and other matters. Also good website to reference for roles in the industry

16. BAFTA Guru, http://guru.bafta.org/, good website for students interested in TV & Film, also has mentoring network.

August 2014