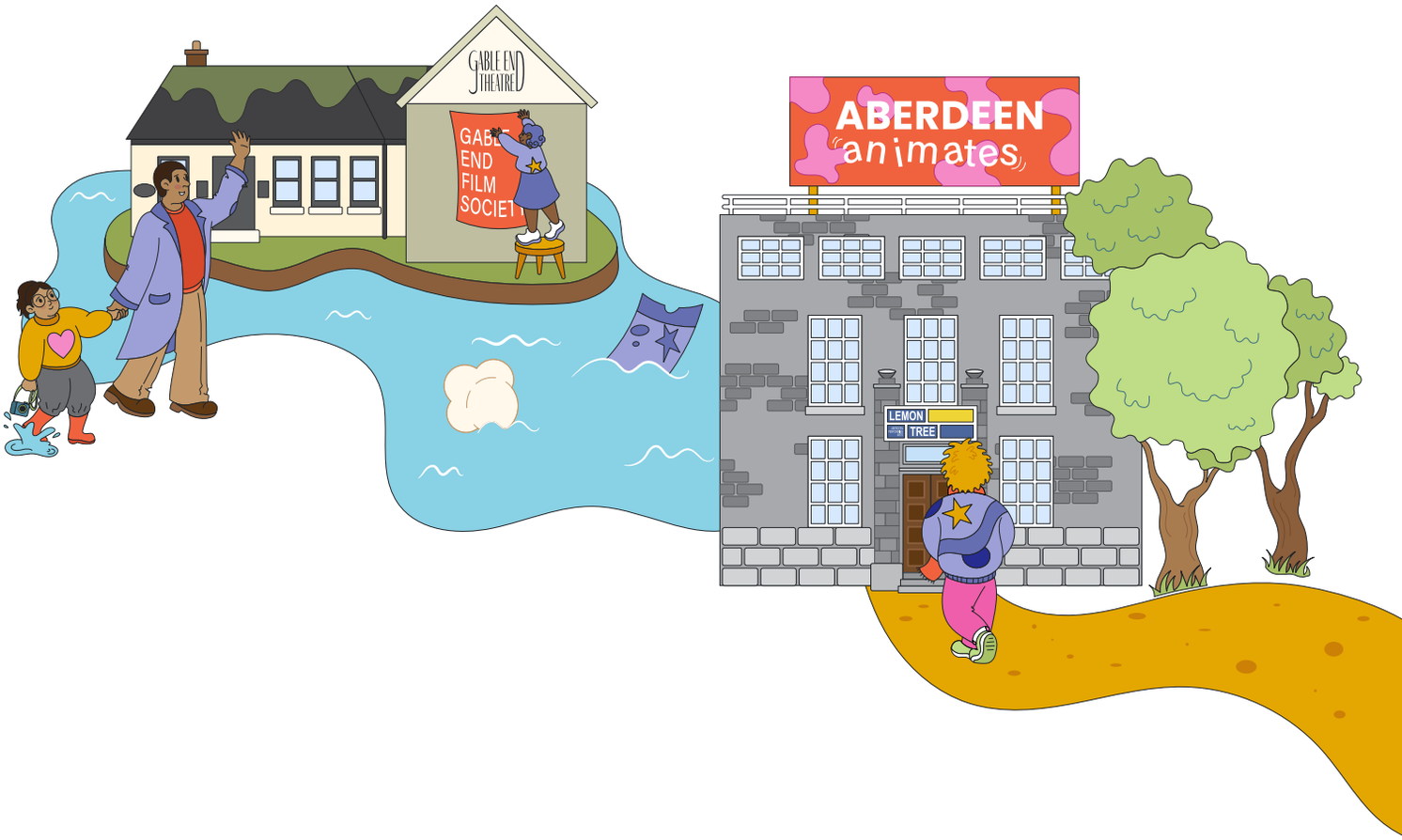
EQUAL MEDIA & CULTURE CENTRE FOR SCOTLAND

Film Hub Scotland

‘How do you do it?’

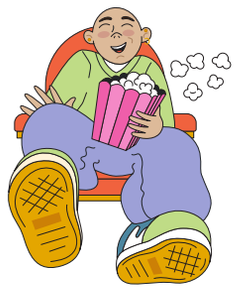
Gender equity in Scotland’s independent film exhibition sector





Produced by Film Hub Scotland and the Equal Media and Culture Centre for Scotland with an independent researcher, November 2026.





Contents

Executive Summary 1
- Key findings 2
- Condensed recommendations 3

Introduction 4
- About us 4
- About this report 4
- Background and Objectives 5

Methodology 15
- Design 15
- Online survey 15
- Follow-up interviews 16
- Limitations 17

Results: Online survey 18

Results: Follow-up interviews 20
- Theme 1: Positive experiences 20
- Theme 2: ‘The way of the world’ 23
- Theme 3: Progress is not linear 25
- Theme 4: Getting a seat at the table 27
- Theme 5: The ‘default white male’ in film exhibition 29
- Theme 6: Lack of safeguarding 31
- Theme 7: Long-term impact of working in film exhibition 33

Discussion and Recommendations 35
- Recommendation cluster 1: Making recruitment more inclusive 36
- Recommendation cluster 2: Increasing transparency and facilitation of early career progression opportunities 38
- Recommendation cluster 3: Widening access to training, mentorship, and peer support 41
- Recommendation cluster 4: Researching rates of pay 44
- Recommendation cluster 5: Ensuring adequate safeguarding measures and inclusive working policies 46

Conclusion 49

Appendices 52
- Appendix 1: Online survey participant profile 52
- Appendix 2: Semi-structured topic guide 56

Executive Summary

Conducted and written jointly by the Equal Media and Culture Centre (EMCC) and Film Hub Scotland (FHS), this research represents an early effort to address the lack of information on the state of gender equity in Scotland's independent film exhibition sector. Although independent film exhibition organisations in Scotland are expected to demonstrate commitments to equity/equality, diversity and inclusion as part of their public funding agreements, there is little data illustrating whether these commitments translate into an equitable environment for the sector's workforce. The aim of this research is to document the experiences and perceptions of people working in Scottish independent cinemas, multi-arts venues, film festivals, and community cinemas to assess the current state of gender equity in the sector and provide actionable recommendations to employers and major stakeholders.

This report collates perspectives gathered through an online survey of FHS member organisations (101 respondents), with 10 follow-up interviews. The study relied on a mixed-method design combining quantitative data with Thematic Analysis.



Key findings

1. Gender inequity in the sector is created and experienced primarily through structural barriers. Rather than overt exclusion, inequity in the film exhibition industry is enabled through a combination of multiple factors and practices, including unclear or weak career progression pathways, low staff turnover (especially at senior level), precarious employment conditions, informal hiring networks, and others. These challenges are intensified by patriarchal perceptions and stereotypes, which remain common.

2. Women's careers are impacted by responsibilities and challenges beyond the workplace. Participants described having to manage caring responsibilities, family commitments, and (peri-)menopause as significantly affecting their career progression opportunities and capacity to work in high-pressure roles common to the film festival sub-sector. These challenges are exacerbated by the prevalence of short-term contracts, which make planning one's future difficult.

3. The sector has seen improvement over time, and many enjoy working in it, but progress is uneven. Participants described their female colleagues as supportive and keen to provide mentorship, and seemed united by a shared love of cinema and the recognition of its cultural and social value. The sector's openness towards flexible working also made it appealing for those balancing their career with caring and family responsibilities. Respondents ultimately acknowledged that the sector has improved over time, although some significant challenges and inequalities persist.

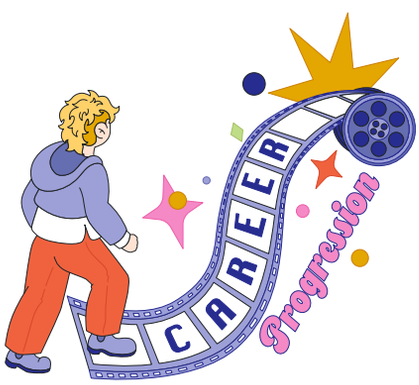
4. The lack of appropriate safeguarding structures and procedures is palpable and concerning. Although 73% report that their workplace has inclusion policies, many respondents noted a lack of adequate safeguarding mechanisms in the sector, which led to insufficient accountability for instances of inappropriate behaviour. Given that many organisations are small and lack dedicated HR staff or resources, there is a demand for external protection and support facilitated by sector stakeholders.

5. There are significant data gaps about Scotland's film exhibition sector. 54% of respondents agree that there exists a gender pay gap, but many respondents felt that they did not know how their salaries compared with their colleagues or industry peers. The research identified a general lack of data on sector demographics, pay, and the impact of EDI policies. This restricts our ability to ascertain the current state of gender equity in the sector and measure future progress.

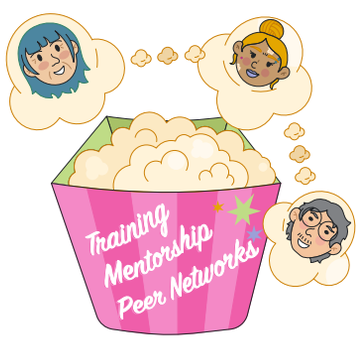
Condensed Recommendations



1. Make recruitment more transparent and inclusive



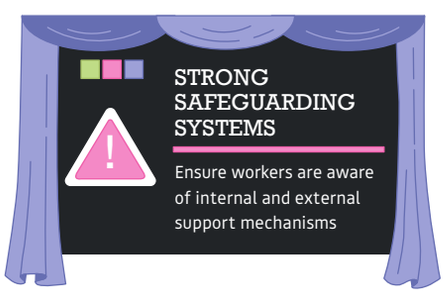
2. Strengthen progression pathways for both early- and mid-career workers



3. Widen access to training and mentorship and support peer networks



4. Conduct research into sector rates of pay



5. Ensure that the sector employs strong safeguarding systems, and that workers are aware of both internal and external support mechanisms

Introduction

About us

The **Equal Media and Culture Centre** (EMCC) is an intersectional feminist hub for research, monitoring and advocacy for women's and intersecting equality in Scotland's media and culture sectors. It is a project of **Engender**, Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation.

Film Hub Scotland (FHS) is one of eight regional Hubs that comprise the **British Film Institute's (BFI) Film Audience Network (FAN)**. FAN was created to ensure that people across the UK have the maximum possible opportunity to watch and enjoy screen culture, regardless of their geography or circumstance. FAN is a membership-driven structure, and FHS supports a group of over 320 independent film exhibitors – from community cinemas to multi-arts venues – to reach as many new and existing audiences as possible. To achieve this objective and enable exhibitors to better meet FAN priorities, FHS builds the capacity of local organisations through skill development and network facilitation. FHS is jointly funded by Screen Scotland and the BFI awarding National Lottery funding.

This research project was supported by EMCC and Film Hub Scotland, with the help of National Lottery funding and additional data provided by Creative Scotland.

About this report

Scotland's independent film exhibition sector showcases creativity and diversity, on and off screen. The sector exemplifies the social good and positive cultural and wellbeing impact that independent cinema can have on local communities.

It also, like the rest of the culture sector, reflects inequalities within wider society. Women can face multiple barriers to sustaining fulfilling, long-term careers in the creative industries, yet there is little existing research to explain the specific challenges that contribute to this situation in film

exhibition.[1] A recognition of this knowledge gap prompted this report.

By combining EMCC's strength as a research hub and FHS's direct access to a group of local organisations working in the screen sector, this report aims to identify actionable interventions that film exhibitors, funders, advocacy groups, and sector stakeholders can implement to contribute to a more equitable working environment for women working in Scottish cinemas, community screening groups, film clubs, and film festivals.

This report presents the results of a survey of Scotland's independent film exhibitors alongside an analysis of follow-up interviews. It then produces a set of recommendations on how funders, sector stakeholders and film exhibitors can best support those within the sector.

The recommendations are divided as such, providing each group with actions and tools appropriate to their role within the sector. We are keenly aware of the existing pressures affecting independent film exhibitors; this report is intended to support them to be more equitable and inclusive organisations, not simply to increase their already challenging workload.

The findings of this report will also inform FHS's approach to sector advocacy, capacity-building activities for its membership, and the selection of audience-facing projects it supports. We hope that our findings and recommendations offer a launchpad from which positive change can occur – both in Scotland and across the UK film exhibition sector more broadly.

Background and Objectives

Scotland's film exhibition sector

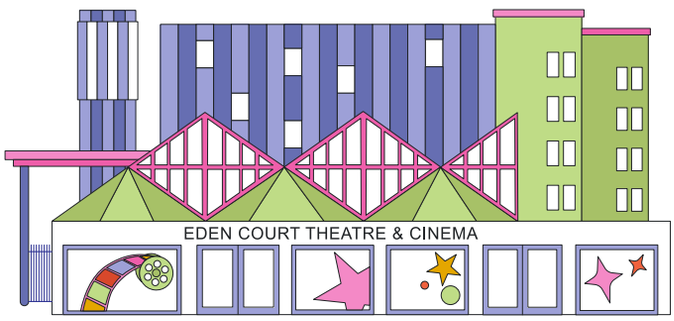
Scotland's film exhibition sector is not homogenous. Indeed, its film exhibitors are as diverse as their audiences. They include multiplexes, independent and boutique cinemas, multi-arts venues, film festivals, community cinemas, and touring screening facilities.

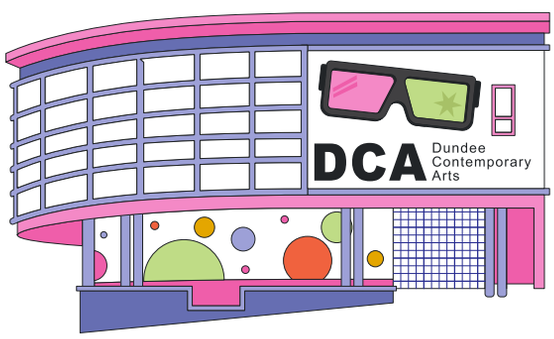
These generally comprise three categories: large, multinational multiplex

---

1 https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/7.-i-just-didnt-see-anyone-like-me.pdf

cinema chains (e.g. Odeon, Vue, Cineworld) that are predominantly privately owned commercial companies and generally show Hollywood blockbuster titles; smaller boutique commercial chains (e.g. Everyman and Curzon); and community-based independent cinemas that are frequently incorporated as not-for-profit organisations or registered charities.[2]







This research focuses specifically on **independent film exhibitors**. This term is used throughout this report to refer collectively to cinemas, film festivals and community cinemas that are run independently of a larger body and show independent and 'specialised' cinema (i.e. independent fiction/documentary features, British independent cinema, international independent cinema, moving-image art and experimental film, and archival/ heritage cinema).

Film Hub Scotland has over 320 independent film exhibitor members, spanning every local authority in the country.[3] They range from multi-arts venues, such as the Dundee Contemporary Arts and Eden Court, who have full-time programmers and marketing departments, to local community cinemas, such as Skye Community Cinema or Borscht Polish Film Club, who are largely run by volunteers.

Despite the breadth and diversity of its participants, independent film

2 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmcumeds/328/report.html#heading-6

3 https://www.filmhubscotland.com/meet-our-members/

exhibition accounts for less than 25% of the UK's total box office.[4] Without the large income that Hollywood blockbusters bring, these exhibitors must rely on skilful programming, continuous audience development and high standards of accessibility to welcome the maximum possible audience to their screenings. As charitable or not-for-profit entities, many also undertake education or outreach work within their communities.

Many of Scotland's independent exhibitors are sector-leading in their consideration of accessibility, inclusivity and audience development. Organisations such as Scottish Queer International Film Festival (SQIFF), Alchemy Film and Arts, and Glasgow Film Theatre welcome diverse audiences through their actively inclusive approach to venue access, audience outreach and targeted programming. As a result, the Independent Cinema Office (ICO) deem independent cinemas as 'the most accessible spaces to engage in cultural experiences for many people who might not visit a gallery, theatre or a museum'.[5] FHS-supported projects reflect this; between 2023–26, 34% of audiences surveyed by our members identified as having a disability or long-term health condition, versus 21% of the general population.[6]

Despite being sector leaders in terms of access and inclusion, independent cinemas are currently facing what the ICO has called their 'most precarious position for decades'.[7] The long-term impact of COVID, which has resulted in consistently lower admissions than pre-pandemic levels,[8] continues to impact film exhibitors' already precarious financial reserves. The UK's cost of living crisis has put independent film exhibitors under further financial and operational pressure.[9] As a result, many of Scotland's independent film exhibitors rely on public funding to stay afloat. Among independent cinemas, 46% of respondents to an ICO survey in 2024 said they needed further

---

4 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmcumeds/328/report.html#heading-6

5 https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/125483/pdf/

6 https://www.gov.scot/publications/evidence-review-inequalities-challenges-experienced-disabled-people-scotland/pages/5/

7 https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/125655/html/

8 https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/official-bfi-statistics-2025

9 Ibid.

financial support to remain operational.[10] This is reflected in a high rate of venue closures: since 2019, the number of total cinemas in the UK (977 as of 2024) has decreased by 10%, while the number of independent cinemas (447 as of 2024) has decreased by 21%.[11]



This report focuses on Scotland's independent film exhibition sector. Partly this is due to the data available to the co-authors of this report: as a project partner, FHS have direct access to over 320 independent film exhibitors comprising its membership. It is also due to the correlated and compounding pressures that these organisations face: changing audience habits, economic instability, and the necessity of evidencing high levels of access and inclusion whilst competing for oversubscribed public funds.

Towards an equitable sector

As of early 2026, based on FHS surveying for this report, women (including trans women) represent more than 60% of the annual Scottish audience for

---

10 https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/advice-support/support-and-growth-for-independent-cinemas/

11 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmcumeds/328/report.html#heading-6



*Annual Scottish audience for independent and specialised cinema

independent and specialised cinema. Many impactful Scottish film exhibition organisations are women-led (e.g. Glasgow Film, Scottish Documentary Institute, HippFest Silent Film Festival, SQIFF) and centre women's cinema in their programming (e.g. Sea Change Film Festival, Invisible Women, Sapphic Film Club).

Yet, as across the wider culture sector, long-standing inequalities exist. Women working in film exhibition face multiple barriers compared to their male peers, such as unequal pay issues, lack of flexibility around caring responsibilities and lack of clear career progression opportunities. To stop the 'leaky pipeline' of women leaving the film exhibition sector, sector-wide intervention is required, which would identify and confront the structural barriers that women, especially marginalised women, face in the sector.

Global and national crises which have negatively impacted cultural organisations have also affected the workforce, worsening employment conditions amid shrinking budgets.[12] The nature of work in the independent film exhibition sector, which often takes the form of intense, time-sensitive and one-off publicly funded projects and annual festivals, exacerbates already existing inequalities. Precarious employment disproportionately impacts marginalised women, self-employed workers and workers with caring responsibilities, who are predominately women.[13] Three times the number of women to men cite care responsibilities as a major barrier to their work in the arts.[14]

Long hours and weekend work are frequent components to working in film exhibition. The ICO's UK Film Exhibition Workforce Survey 2026 found that 80% of respondents work beyond their contracted hours and that 40% of overtime is unpaid.[15] The same survey reported

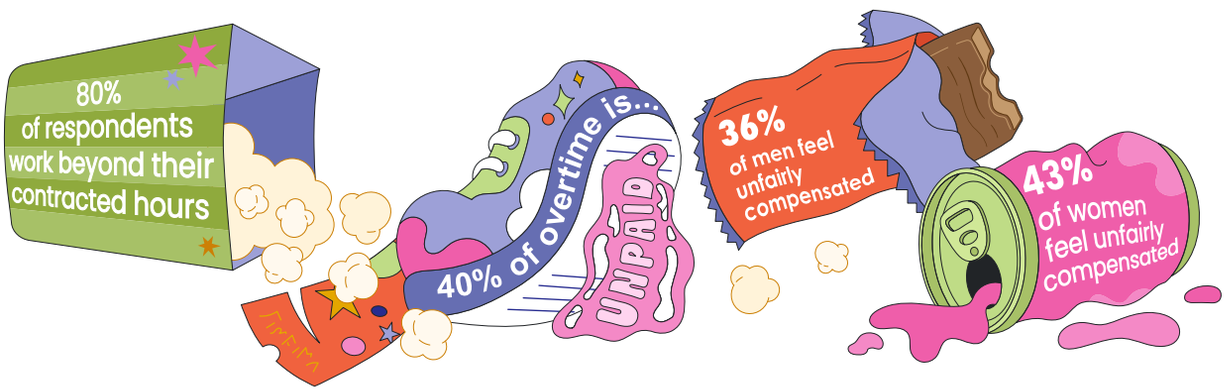
12 https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/7.-i-just-didnt-see-anyone-like-me.pdf

13 Ibid.

14 https://www.stuc.org.uk/resources/freelance-and-forgotten-a-report-on-worker-exploitation-in-scotlands-creative-industries.pdf

15 https://ico-assets-live.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/21114107/ICO_Workforce-Survey-2026_FINAL.pdf

that only 28% of the total workforce reported feeling fairly paid, with 43% of women feeling unfairly compensated compared to 36% of men.[16] At the current rate of progress, gender equity in the wider film industry will only be achieved in 2085 in the UK.[17]



The film exhibition sector, and the wider culture sector, has a responsibility to ensure that everyone has the opportunity and right to participate in Scotland's cultural activities, and to actively remove barriers to participation. This ethical and human rights consideration is enshrined in Article 27 in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights: '[e]veryone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts'.[18]

There is also a strong business argument to be made for achieving equity: gender-diverse and ethnically diverse companies are more likely to outperform their competitors on profitability and innovation.[19] Research by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills found that diversity, if appropriately managed, can result in business benefits, but to achieve these business benefits, firms must go beyond legal compliance and proactively develop workplace strategies about equality and diversity.[20]

---

16 Ibid.

17 https://womeninview.ca/wp-content/uploads/ReframingThePicture_2024_GEPReport_CC-BY.pdf

18 https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

19 https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity#/

20 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78d762e5274a277e68fe2c/the_business_case_for_equality_and_diversity.pdf

EDI (Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) are broad terms within the culture sector, used with a variety of meanings and purposes. This report utilises EMCC's definition of EDI, which encompasses a broad set of strategies aimed at transforming workforces, leadership and outputs to be more inclusive for women, Black and minoritised people.[21] We have also chosen to use the term equity in this report recognising that people live with a diversity of circumstances and require different resources based on different needs. Recognising that gendered inequities within the film exhibition sector are intersectional, we have aimed to take an intersectional approach with this report. Coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the term 'intersectionality' describes how discrimination and oppression directed towards people's identities, including but not limited to their race, gender and class, overlap and compound their overall experience of discrimination and inequality.[22] For a policy, programme or report to be intersectional, it needs to acknowledge that different women face inequality in different ways and to varying extents.[23]

Throughout this research, we will focus on the experiences of employees and freelancers within the sector. Whilst there is an essential raft of volunteers who help cinemas, film festivals and community cinemas to operate, we want to understand how those in paid employment – with a legal entitlement to a contract, workplace policies and hiring procedures – experience gender equity and inequity. The perception and lived experience of these policies and procedures for those working within the sector can help us to understand what meaningful steps have been taken to achieve gender equity – and what gaps remain.

The role of funders and sector stakeholders

With many of Scotland's independent film exhibitors in receipt of public

---

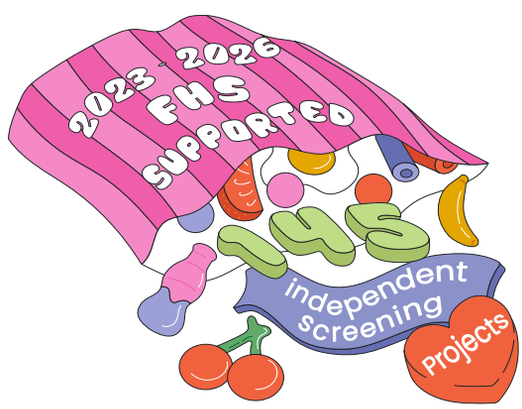
21 https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/emcc-report-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-women-in-media-creative-and-cultural-sectors-in-scotland.pdf; https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/emcc-from-token-to-transformation-discussion-paper-january-2025.pdf

22 https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

23 https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/emcc-from-token-to-transformation-discussion-paper-january-2025.pdf

funding, there is an opportunity for funders to directly inform the equity and inclusion policies, procedures and plans of these organisations. The primary public funder of independent film exhibition in Scotland is Creative Scotland (which distributes multi-year funding to arts organisations, including cinemas, film festivals, and multi-arts venues) and its subsidiary, Screen Scotland (who run the 'Film Festival and Screening Programme Fund', supporting film festivals and year-round screening activity, among other discrete funding streams). Established film exhibition organisations with national reach may also be eligible to apply for the BFI Audience Projects Fund to develop initiatives of national significance.

A smaller stakeholder in the sector, Film Hub Scotland forms part of the BFI Film Audience Network and is a recipient of National Lottery funding from both the BFI and Screen Scotland. Whilst not a National Lottery funder itself, it uses these awards to support its membership to reach representative audiences, enhance access to screen culture across Scotland, and develop skills and capacity to equip its members to better meet FAN's aims. In the funding period 2023–26, Film Hub Scotland supported 145 independent screening projects, each of which aligned with one or more of the Priority Outcomes outlined in BFI's Screen Culture 2033 strategy.[24]



A requirement of BFI funding, Film Hub Scotland member support, and – since 2022 – Screen Scotland awards is that each project responds to BFI's Diversity Standards.[25] These are a set of guidelines designed to drive equitable opportunity and improve representation across the film sector, including film exhibition.[26] Scotland's independent film exhibitors are therefore asked to demonstrate how their projects meaningfully and tangibly engage with five core themes: on-screen representation, creative leadership and project teams,

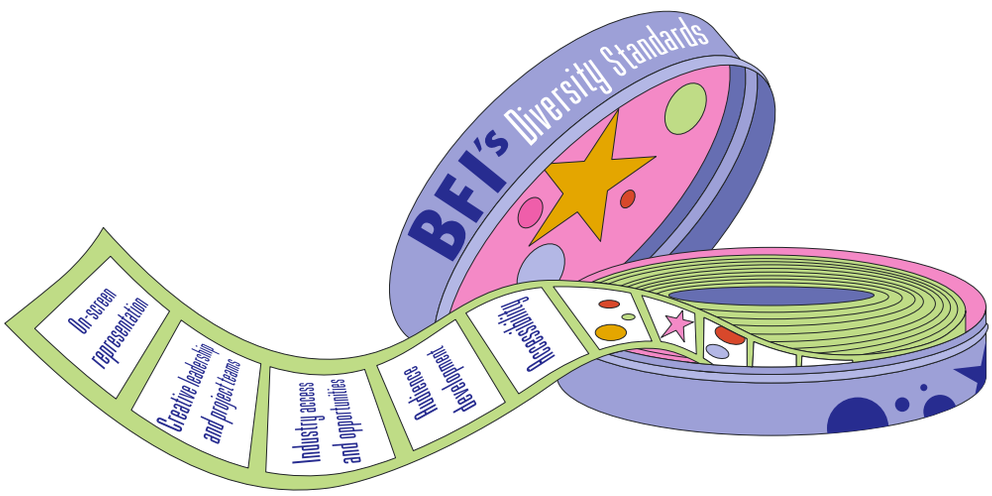
---

24 https://www.bfi.org.uk/strategy-policy/screen-culture-2033

25 'BFI Diversity Standards,' Screen Scotland, accessed June 2026 https://www.screen.scot/funding-and-support/support/bfi-diversity-standards-screen-scotland

26 https://www.bfi.org.uk/inclusion-film-industry/bfi-diversity-standards

industry access and opportunities, audience development, and accessibility. Recipients of public funding in Scotland are thus incentivised to consider diversity and inclusion as core elements of their work and report on their progress in these areas in their end-of-project monitoring forms, which are often prerequisite to receiving the last instalment of their award.



Addressing the research gap

Aside from end-of-project monitoring forms, which are completed by organisational leads or fundraising staff, there is little information about whether funding priorities – such as diverse workforces, inclusive policies and accessible workspaces – have a direct impact on the lived experiences of those within the independent film sector or broad equality outcomes such as increased representation in leadership roles and equal pay. Creative Scotland require applicants to provide Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plans as part of funding proposals yet, as noted by EMCC in a 2026 report, there is 'no formal monitoring and evaluation framework in place between Creative Scotland and funded organisations on EDI action plans'.[27] With audiences as its primary focus, FHS does not collect diversity data on the workforce of the organisations within its membership. The workforce of FHS member organisations is always changing, and capturing up-to-date samples at regular intervals would require extensive surveying and analysis resources

27 https://emcc.engender.org.uk/news/blog/emcc-release-a-new-paper-from-token-to-transformation/

beyond the Hub's remit and capacity.
Some research participants shared a feeling of 'is it just me?' when describing barriers and issues they have faced within the sector. Without the data to track the fulfilment, or otherwise, of sector-wide EDI plans, it is not currently possible to adequately track or measure the real extent to which the sector supports, or fails to support, equity.

This reflects a wider data gap in independent film exhibition. There is little existing research on Scotland's exhibition sector workforce. Organisations like the Film and TV Charity have gathered robust data on the finances and mental wellbeing of film and TV workers UK-wide, but cinemas are sometimes grouped in the 'Other' category, which combines cinema workers with 'a mix of film and TV'.[28] In the ICO's UK Film Exhibition Workforce surveys, Scotland's exhibitors have accounted for 18% of respondents in 2026 and 14% in 2022, making it difficult to access Scotland-specific findings.[29]

Undertaking this research is an early attempt to confront the lack of available data and gain a clearer picture of the working conditions in the Scottish film exhibition sector. However, there is a need for more in-depth research that examines the correlation between the Diversity Standards and the staff cultures of organisations within Scotland's film exhibition sector. There is also a sense that sector stakeholders need to explore how they could gather more comprehensive diversity data and resource monitoring and evaluation for EDI plans presented in funding proposals without placing an overwhelming bureaucratic onus onto its awardees, bearing in mind that many arts organisations do not have paid staff undertaking grant-writing tasks.

We see those who work within the sector as inextricably linked to their audiences. To understand what is needed to develop a thriving independent cinema landscape with true inclusion at its heart, more research is needed that directly engages with those who work within it.

---

28 https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/assets/documents/Reports/financial-resilience-report-2024.pdf

29 https://ico-assets-live.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/21114107/ICO_Workforce-Survey-2026_FINAL.pdf

Methodology

Design

This study used a mixed-method approach implemented over two stages. First, we collected data in response to specific questions about gender equity in the Scottish film exhibition sector. The questions were devised to focus on the respondents' experiences of a gender pay gap, equal opportunities for men and women, and gender discrimination. They offer a snapshot of the sector at this current moment, and were not intended to create a final, fully comprehensive assessment of gender inequity within the sector. We used a Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree', to allow respondents to share both their sense of the sector at large, and their experience of inclusive policies within the workplace. Second, we collected qualitative data to explore, in greater depth, how people felt about the current state of gender equity in the sector, and to gather examples of both good practice and suggestions on how to promote gender equity. These findings were then considered together to inform recommendations for promoting inclusion and equity in the sector.



Online survey

An online survey was carried out from September to October 2025. The target respondents were individuals working across the 300+ independent film exhibitors that comprise FHS' membership (see Appendix 1 for respondent sample breakdown). It was distributed via FHS and EMCC's communication channels, including newsletters, social media (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) and direct email to FHS members, partners and stakeholders. The survey was open to anyone working in Scotland's independent film exhibition sector, regardless of their gender identity.

The survey asked participants about the extent to which they agreed with a series of questions about gender and equal pay, opportunities to advance and inform decision-making, and discrimination in the sector. They were also asked about any policies their workplace may have in place to facilitate inclusion.

Follow-up interviews

After completing the online survey, participants were asked if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview. In total, 41 people indicated they were interested. Individuals were randomly selected from this list and contacted until the recruitment target of 10 was reached. (In total, 29 people were contacted and invited to take part).

An independent researcher unaffiliated with Film Hub Scotland or EMCC was responsible for conducting follow-up interviews, analysing all quantitative and qualitative data, and developing the initial draft of the research report.

After the interviews were concluded, any identifying information was removed from the transcripts. A Thematic Analysis was then carried out.[30] This is an active process where the researcher identifies relevant pieces of text and groups pertinent pieces of text together based on observed patterns across interviews and uses these to generate themes which help to answer the research questions.

This project was carried out in accordance with research ethics guidance from the Social Research Association.[31] This includes obtaining continuous informed consent from participants, preserving their confidentiality throughout the research process, and taking steps to reduce the risk of any potential harm to participants or the researcher.

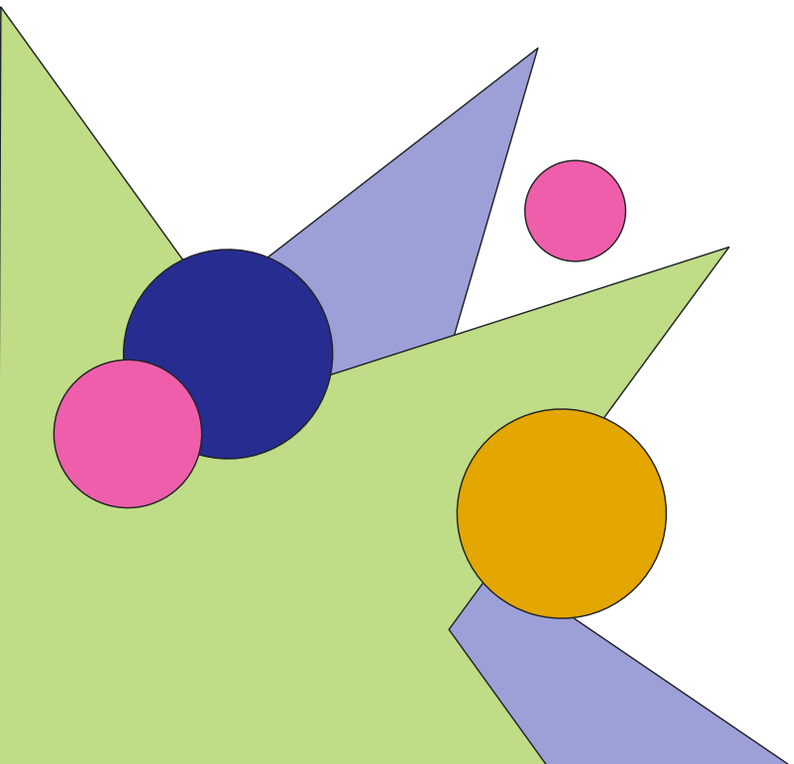
---

30 Clarke V, Braun V. Thematic analysis. The journal of positive psychology. 2017 May 4;12(3):297-8.

31 Social Research Association, 'Research Ethics Guidance', accessed May 2026: https://the-sra.org.uk/SRA/SRA/Ethics/Research-Ethics-Guidance.aspx?hkey=5e809828-fb49-42be-a17e-c95d6cc72da1

Limitations

There are limitations to this research because of its small sample size (101 survey respondents and 10 interviewees) and reliance on the Film Hub Scotland membership network as a respondent base. Due to the core objective of the BFI Film Audience Network to address barriers preventing UK audiences from accessing specialised and cultural cinema, Film Hub Scotland members are likely to subscribe to a progressive ethos and actively engage with initiatives addressing inequity and underrepresentation affecting both their workforce and audiences. Organisations already invested in the mission of increasing gender equity in Scotland's film exhibition sector were thus likely over-represented in the sample. While this research includes the perspectives of respondents who identify as non-binary and gender queer, it primarily focuses on women's experiences in the independent film exhibition sector. Although it is reasonable to assume that several structural challenges mentioned in the report equally affect non-binary and gender queer professionals as marginalised individuals, further research could focus specifically on the experiences and equity of non-binary, gender queer, and trans people in the sector.





Results: Online survey

Overall, responses to the survey questions create a mixed picture with regards to the perception of gender equity in the sector. A similar proportion of participants agree (39%) and disagree (34%) that women and men receive equal pay. However, respondents are much more likely to agree (54%) than to disagree (15%) that there is a gender pay gap.

There are two important takeaways from this data. It shows that whilst a significant number of people agree that the sector has a gender pay gap, they still perceive there to be equal pay for individuals who do the same job, regardless of their gender. The open response questions suggest that the pay gap may be due to the result of senior roles typically being occupied by men. Respondents observe that gendered occupational segregation is normal in the sector, with men more likely to be in more senior positions (e.g. director, senior programming positions), and women are more likely to be in 'supporting' roles (e.g. admin, assistant positions) rather than positions of power. This underrepresentation of women in senior roles arguably contributes to a sector-wide perception that women and men do not earn the same amount throughout their working lives, despite generally receiving equal pay if they occupy the same job role.

Only half of all participants agree that women and men are equally involved in decision-making (50%), and less than half agree that there are equal opportunities for men and women to advance in the sector. A clear majority (45%) agree that women experience discrimination in the sector. In open-text responses, participants describe that women's achievements are more likely to be overlooked and perceive a lack of training opportunities for women who wish to progress in their careers.

Multiple-choice questions: policies to promote gender equity

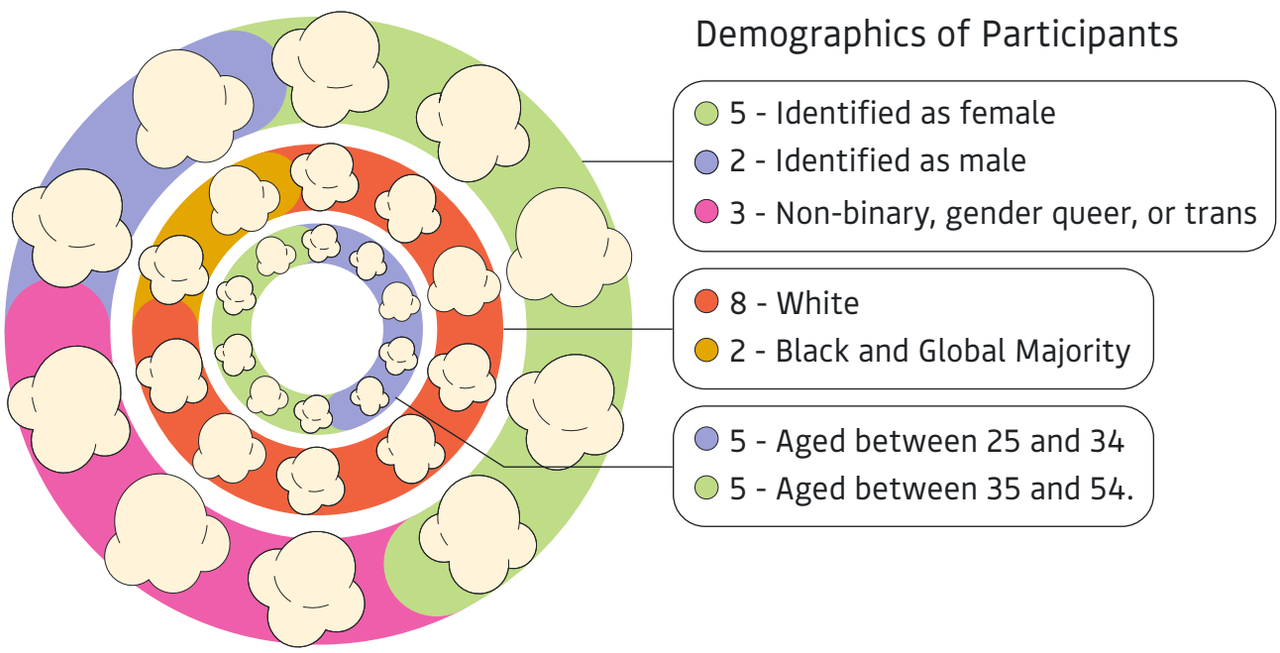
Overall, a clear majority (73%) of participants report that their workplace has policies in place to facilitate inclusion. However, less than 60% agree that these policies have made a substantive positive difference.

It is difficult to make reliable inferences from this data without more granular research into the specific nature of inclusion policies offered by local film exhibitors. Overall, the fact that inclusion policies are both common and frequently utilised by the workforce is very positive. Nevertheless, it seems that more should be done to ensure that policies offered by organisations actively respond to the support needs of their staff teams.

Results: Follow-up interviews

Participants

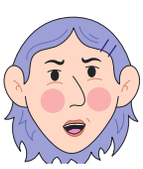
Of the 10 interview participants, 5 identified as female, 2 identified as male, and 3 described themselves as non-binary, gender queer, or trans. The majority (8) were white. Half were aged between 25 and 34, and half were aged between 35 and 54.



Theme 1: Positive experiences

Subtheme 1: The sector allows for flexibility

Most participants described their overall experience in the sector as positive. Several women participants acknowledged the potential for gender to influence experience, yet they did not feel it had been a direct barrier to their individual entry into the sector career progression.



'I would say working in the sector [...] my main experience [has been] very positive. I think there's [...] quite positive gender equity, but [...] obviously ignoring a lot of the kind of systemic differences that people of different genders face.'

Illustrations of people are for artwork purposes only and do not represent the participants involved in interviews

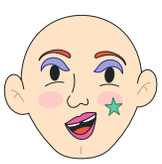
Although intensive ways of working were generally viewed as incompatible with other responsibilities, some participants in permanent roles felt that the unconventional working schedule demanded by the sector was beneficial for their family life. They felt that the nature of the work, with frequent evening and weekend responsibilities, allowed them to easier plan around family commitments, manage school pickups and childcare. Working in the arts was overall viewed as more flexible and less high-pressured than working in a traditional corporate setting, and participants felt the film exhibition sector allowed them to channel their true passion and creativity more than it would have been possible in other roles.



'I've got responsibilities for school pickups and swimming club things and all of that sort of stuff. [L]ooking at my husband's industry [...] it's not as flexible, it's not as [...] generous towards [...] what you do outwith your work life'

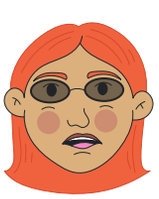
Subtheme 2: Support from other women

Female participants consistently brought up the support received from other women as a positive element of working in the sector. This support included active mentorship from female managers, positive experiences of working with female colleagues, and developing supportive networks over time.



'I'm really fortunate that I've got a really wonderful group of women that I've known for a long time that support me. I know if I had a really [...] big problem and I had time to talk to them about it, [...] they would listen and give me some good advice or [...] just listen.'

Participants described feeling more supported and actively mentored by women in managerial positions, rather than their male counterparts. They felt particularly supported by female colleagues with regards to their understanding of the need to manage family commitments, such as childcare.



'I feel that every opportunity that I've [benefitted from] has been through a woman in some kind of way, which is really telling. And the few times that I've worked with men [...] there's less of [...] a mentorship relationship.'

One participant summarised,



‘I think the makeup of a team is […] probably the most important thing, like the gender balance in a team. […] I work with an almost exclusively female-identifying team. I couldn’t even […] imagine it not being like that. And I can’t imagine what my workplace would be without that.’

Subtheme 3: Love for film as an art form

Participants consistently described being motivated by their passion for their work, partly due to their own love of film and a sense of moral duty to advocate for film as an art form. They viewed film as a medium to be enjoyed by everyone, rather than those already in the sector, and highlighted the importance of representation to allow diverse stories to be shared.

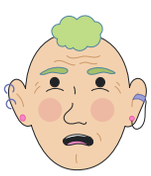


‘[T]hat’s the thing, that’s why we all work in this sector. It’s not because of the money, it’s because we love what we do and love audiences and love film.’



‘[T]he only reason it matters is because […] this is a public sector, and we need representation and equality because we serve an audience […] at the end of the day. [I]f I worked in investment banking, […] I would care […] privately in my own life. But I care publicly about this stuff because film is […] all public facing.’

However, several participants described a contrast between feeling grateful for the opportunity to work in a competitive sector with struggling to meet their financial needs due to low pay. They also worried about job stability when relying on short-term contracts.



‘I was […] constantly struggling for money. […] From the outset, it might have looked like I had this amazing job where I was doing all these […] really interesting things and travelling extensively. But the flip side of that was I was just constantly at the bottom of my overdraft, which was just so difficult to […] manage. [T]hat sense of it never being a […] steady space was really, really difficult.’

Theme 2: ‘The way of the world’

Subtheme 1: The patriarchal society

Throughout our discussions, participants regularly framed their experiences within the context of society at large. They struggled to disentangle their experiences of marginalisation in the film exhibition sector from wider gender dynamics in contemporary society, comparing patterns in the sector to the patriarchal ‘way of the world’, illustrating the enmeshment of systemic, structural, and sector-specific issues.

This came to the fore when participants were asked about whether they had observed a gender pay gap in the sector. The majority did not share specific examples, yet they frequently reflected on the wider social context and the makeup of the sector overall. Several felt there would naturally be a pay gap based on gender and ethnicity, as people in higher-up positions of power in the sector tend to be older white men. They did not feel this was specific to the film exhibition sector, as it was also reflective of wider society. One female participant reflected on having to leave a previous job due to childcare, starting at the ‘bottom rung’, and then building her career back up, which would rarely be expected of male counterparts.



‘I don’t know any man that has ever had to do that, [i.e.] has had to quit their job due to childcare issues.’

Most were relatively confident that their own employer was paying staff fairly but lacked knowledge of how people were paid across different employers and therefore had little ‘benchmarking’ to know if they were being paid less than others in similar roles in other organisations. This lack of transparency was consistently raised in response to questions about the existence of a pay gap.

Subtheme 2: Women’s work beyond the workplace

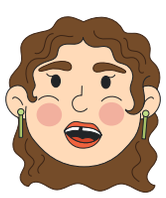
Participants directly involved in film festival work described their roles as challenging, with long hours and high expectations. These roles demanded intense periods of extensive time commitment, regardless of personal

responsibilities or other professional opportunities. The intense bursts of high activity over short periods of time were described as satisfying but draining. Participants enjoyed seeing their work come to fruition and lead to successful events. However, several reflected that this style of working felt unsustainable in the long run and negatively affected their physical and mental health.



‘It just has to be done. You know, there’s really no negotiation there. You just have to put those kinds of 12-hour days in or whatever to do that work. […] And that started having […] some effects on my health […]. [T]hat was quite alarming. That was a bit of a […] wake-up call.’

For several female participants, their experience of working in the sector was directly influenced by the expectations placed on them outside of work. Balancing work, childcare, caring responsibilities and other elements of family life was noted as especially difficult for people in intense, high-pressure roles, such as those within film festivals. Respondents expressed frustration that women still often carry disproportionate domestic responsibilities, which can hinder their career development.



‘I do think […] those responsibilities are not the same if you’re a [man]. […] It depends on the man, but my husband hasn’t faced the same responsibilities. […] It’s great that we’re allowed to work [but] we’ve also got to do all the other stuff […] We’re in 2026, […] [but] the balance is not there.’

Subtheme 3: Gender dynamics in workplace relationships

Female participants observed traditional gender dynamics in their interactions with male colleagues. Several recounted being perceived by men as having less authority than they actually did. Others recounted female managers being questioned about their work, input, and responsibilities more than their male counterparts. They believed that both gender and age influenced how others communicated with them, often in a condescending way that seemed more suited for a younger family member than a professional peer. Race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality also likely influence how women are spoken to and perceived in the workforce, especially women who face multiple discriminations.



‘Men are […] given a […] blank level of […] respect [with the assumption] they probably know what they’re talking about. Whereas women are definitely questioned a little bit more. I’ve noticed […] I’m asked, ‘Oh, what’s your position? […] Who are you representing?’ more often than my male counterparts.’

One female participant felt these dynamics were a barrier to accessing training, as her request for formal development was perceived differently compared to similar requests made by her male colleagues. When she requested training, her ability to manage her work was doubted, unlike her male colleagues, who could ask for training without their credibility coming into question.



‘In my experience, [when] I ask for help, responsibility is taken from me because I can’t be trusted, and then I’m given the training. […] Men just assume that it’s ‘just another like notch on the bed’ […] the training and the job and the responsibility. Whereas with women, it feels like a negotiation. You either get one or the other.’

Theme 3: Progress is not linear

Subtheme 1: Improvements made over time

Overall, most participants have observed positive changes taking place in the Scottish film exhibition sector over time. They noticed more women working in the sector overall, increased diversity of people working in festivals, and more industry initiatives encouraging people who experience marginalisation to enter the sector. However, participants consistently noted that people in positions of power, or those who had established a firm position within the sector, tended to be white men who had been in the sector for some time.



‘I think, based on my […] working experience, it is pretty male dominated still, but I think we have been seeing a lot more […] women in the sector, which is good.’

Participants observed greater diversity in certain parts of the sector, noting that some areas seemed more open to change.



‘In terms of independent cinema, there are more women. […] [Y]ou wouldn’t often see four white men on a panel now.’

Overall, participants felt that efforts were being made to increase gender diversity in the sector and shared specific examples of women in positions of power, to whom they looked up. However, there is still a lot of room for improvement:



‘There’s a lot more work to do. [W]e have made a lot of progress in […] recent years. [But we] forget that that […] misogyny is […] embedded in our culture.’



‘[We] move forwards and we move backwards, and it’s not a […] narrative or a trajectory that’s […] straight and dynamic in its […] movement.’

Subtheme 2: Superficial measures

Participants felt that the importance of EDI has grown over time within the sector. However, they distinguished between organisations who merely want to appear diverse and those who actively promote equity by including and supporting staff who experience marginalisation.

Encouraging applications from people from marginalised backgrounds was viewed by some as ‘window dressing’. One participant described how organisations often did not follow through on their EDI commitments by failing to sufficiently consider the protected characteristics of their applicants.



‘Everybody now says that they are inclusive and that they obviously welcome applications from marginalised individuals. And that’s across, of course, race, gender, sexuality, disability, and all those things. But […] the question that I’ve been asking myself is, “Okay, you say that, but what do you do with this information during […] the hiring process?”’

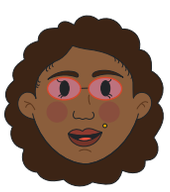
According to the respondents, there are several barriers to ‘true inclusivity’ that organisations in the sector should be tackling. Participants raised the

issue of how staff who experience marginalisation are treated once they are in the sector and questioned whether organisations truly follow through on their intentions. Several participants felt that, while conversations around diversity were a positive step, not enough action was taken as a result.



'I see [...] people sharing their stuff on Instagram or liking their posts. And it just feels like there's a lot of talk around [...] equality and making the industry better. But in real terms [...] because it can be quite a precarious industry, people don't want to lose their potential next job [by embracing real equality measures].'

Despite seeing increased diversity among more junior and entry-level positions in the sector, participants noted that the people in positions of power remain typically white, cis-gendered, and male. This was viewed as a barrier to inclusion and equity, as the workforce may appear more diverse, but the people who influence decision-making remain largely the same. Another participant described feeling 'pushed along' to create an image of diversity and improve public perception of the sector.

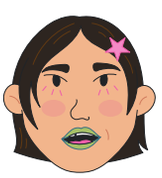


'I'm a black woman, and a lot of film [is] about [...] public image a lot of the time. [T]hat's what these organisations are ultimately interested in. They need to [...] prove to the public [...] why they exist. And so [...] PR and [...] marketing is [...] really important. And that's why a lot of people get [...] tokenised within the industry.'

Theme 4: Getting a seat at the table

Subtheme 1: Staff turnover

Participants consistently identified lack of opportunities in the sector as a barrier to progression, regardless of gender. Participants felt that industry initiatives encouraging underrepresented individuals to enter the sector were insufficient to change the makeup of the overall workforce, as people struggled to progress past the entry-level career stage.



'There [are] obviously lots of brilliant schemes that are trying to help get young people and people from different backgrounds into the industry, and then they just get stuck because there's no progression. [T]hey do the

scheme and then there isn't a job [to take afterwards].'

Some felt that the biggest obstacle to those wanting to enter the sector and advance in their career was the lack of staff turnover rather than a low level of support for candidates with protected characteristics.



'If there's underrepresentation, then I don't think it's because a barrier's been put in place. I think [the barrier is] more about positions opening up [in] small-turnover organisations, especially if you're venue-based [...] [The barrier is the lack of] positions opening up rather than it being through gender or ethnicity or sexuality or anything like that.'

Female participants were unsure of the exact impact that their gender had on their career progression challenges. However, they described feeling 'constrained' by a lack of opportunity and noticing similar frustrations in their peers. Some felt that the lack of opportunities for progression helped to maintain the status quo and preserve the insularity of the sector.



'It's kind of hard for me to gauge to what extent gender factors into that, but [...] I'm seeing this [among] other friends and colleagues as well. [It] felt [...] frustrating in many ways [that] those kind[s] of opportunities weren't being made for me. [...] How do I [...] expand further? How do I continue to [...] grow and develop within this practice?'

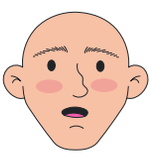
Subtheme 2: Nepotism and informal hiring networks

The existence of 'informal networks' within the sector was identified as another potential barrier to entry and progression, as participants described seeing the same people consistently appointed for senior roles. Participants noted that people with impactful industry connections tended to be white, male, and from more affluent backgrounds, and, due to their relative financial security, people from these backgrounds were more likely to accept offers of time-intensive, short-term work in order to build their reputation within the sector at an early-career stage. The insular nature of these networks is seen as a barrier for meaningful change in the sector, as they help to maintain the structure of the sector in which, historically, men have occupied positions of power.



‘It’s a bit of a […] self-sustaining prophecy where you have these […] structures, […] that can be quite patriarchal, that are just […] perpetuating themselves.’

For participants, lack of access to formal training was viewed as the ‘big divide’. They observed that colleagues with formal training were often white men from more affluent backgrounds, who may have had access to these opportunities through their personal connections. Therefore, inequity of access to formal training and professional opportunities in the sector seems exacerbated by the intersections of gender, race, and class.



‘Formal training is not a thing. People just […] throw you into the deep end, and they expect you to survive. And then in comparison […] you get into a job and then you’re working with […] a white man. And he went to film school in […] New York or whatever. And […] his uncle was […] a cinematographer.’

Theme 5: The ‘default white male’ in film exhibition

As mentioned previously, participants had observed positive changes over time, such as more women working in Scottish film exhibition overall, events targeted at women, increased diversity in festival panels (in terms of gender and ethnicity), provision of childcare at some events, and some measures to reduce barriers to entry level roles in the sector (such as schemes to encourage people from different backgrounds to apply). They felt there were more women ‘in the conversation’. However, despite these improvements, participants reflected that the Scottish film exhibition sector is still male-dominated, and it can be difficult for women to progress in the sector. Several participants emphasised the importance of gumption and self-belief for gaining experience and progressing in their careers. However, they also described various challenges in navigating spaces historically occupied by white men due to their gender and other intersecting forms of marginalisation, such as ethnicity and socioeconomic background.

Subtheme 1: Imposter syndrome

Participants reported a sense of ‘imposter syndrome’ that caused them to

question whether their opinions would be valued in the sector. As a result, they expressed a lack of confidence despite knowing they were highly experienced in their roles. This intersected with other elements of their experience, such as being a first-generation student in their family.



‘I would have always felt not confident enough […] to go for a job as a film programmer. [E]ven though I have obviously programmed for loads of places, programmed for festivals, programmed for cinema, […] I would never have had that confidence to [apply] – the classic imposter syndrome. I have felt that for a really long time.’

Subtheme 2: Gendered communication styles

Several female participants raised the topic of communication styles. They felt that communication was an important skill in the sector, particularly for public-facing roles, management, and networking. However, they felt that their ‘tendency to be more expressive’ as women was devalued in favour of what they perceived as a more typically male communication style. They described the tendency to use ‘boardroom language’, which is inaccessible and discourages asking questions, and which can be mistaken for ‘challenging someone’s authority’. Participants described how a more ‘feminine’ communication style feels more prosocial and lends itself to collaborative working.

Communication was also influenced by other marginalised aspects of participants’ identities. They described feeling out of place due to being an ethnic minority and having a less affluent background than their peers. In response to the perception that their natural communication style could be considered unprofessional by some, participants described adjusting their manner of speaking to sound, for example, less working-class or asking fewer questions to fit in with their colleagues’ ‘male-coded’ communication styles.

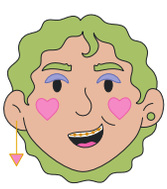
However, they believed that their adaptable communication style could in some instances result in them assuming extra responsibilities without adequate support, as they could more effectively work with people from different backgrounds.



‘One of my skills is I’m able to communicate with different people and communicate quite […] complex ideas to so many different types of people, which I don’t think is a skill that a lot of […] male white producers develop because they only ever play with other male white producers. And because of that, I’m […] put into […] positions where I’m […] managing people, [… even though] I don’t actually have any management experience.’

Subtheme 3: Pigeonholing women’s experience

Participants described a disregard for stories about women, or enjoyed by women, and likened this to the way that women’s role in the film sector has historically been devalued.



‘Women have always been there contributing, but […] they’ve [… not been] part of the picture. Historically, they’ve been […] downplayed. [S]omething that I talk about a lot is [… that] media that is targeted at women specifically is often […] trivialised and not […] valued as […] true art, like your “chick flicks” or rom-coms or whatever.’

One participant described how her identity influenced people’s perceptions of her at work. She was presumed to be the best person to work on stories relating to elements of her identity, although she did not necessarily have personal or professional experience relevant to the subject matter. This ‘assumed expertise in being black and a woman’ felt limiting, as she did not wish her work to be constrained to these subjects.



‘[It’s an] assumed sort of expertise in being black and a woman. [They say,] “You do […] the black woman programme […] You seem to know a lot about it, so why don’t you do it?”’

Theme 6: Lack of safeguarding

Participants raised several points relating to the treatment of those working in the Scottish film exhibition sector, including how incidents of mistreatment have been handled as well as attitudes towards these incidents.

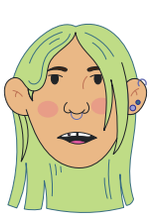
Subtheme 1: Response to internal and external incidents

Insufficient safeguarding of people who experience marginalisation was raised by participants in several different contexts. Participants shared that they were personally impacted by topics regularly discussed in panel sessions at festivals they worked on, as well as everyday conversations that could affect marginalised groups, like those on immigration and affirmative action. Some expressed the need for more awareness of the impact of these discussions on marginalised people's mental wellbeing, and the need for greater support in consideration of recent events, such as the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of sex in the Equality Act (2010).[32]

Several participants shared personal or second-hand examples of mistreatment while working in the sector, including sexist and racially insensitive comments and sexual harassment. They reported that some figures in the sector are known for inappropriate behaviour, but there have been no consequences for their action. This was particularly frustrating due to the contrast between the desire to maintain a positive public image of the sector and the real treatment of women working in the sector 'behind closed doors'.

Subtheme 2: Insufficient accountability

Participants reported that a lack of regulation presented a specific challenge to safeguarding those working in the Scottish film exhibition sector. Several participants were confident that their own organisation was equipped to support them if they were to experience mistreatment and felt there are effective policies in place to support this. However, others identified a general lack of accountability in the sector, as there is rarely a dedicated channel for reporting incidents (such as an in-house Human Resources function).



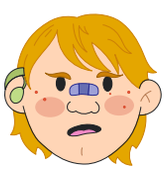
'There's [such a] grey area around arts organisations in that way where, [...] if you're a charity, then you can turn to your trustees to [...] be that backstop. But [...] a lot of organisations aren't even charities. [...] So, there's a lot of [...] grey area in terms of, if something happens, who do

32 https://supremecourt.uk/uploads/uksc_2024_0042_judgment_aea6c48cee.pdf

you go to?'

Some participants reported that, rather than flagging incidents to managers or colleagues, they were instead advised to resolve the issues themselves or stay silent. This was viewed as the only practical outcome rather than a proper grievance process, as no follow-up action was expected to be taken if they reported these incidents.

One participant described an impression of a double standard whereby men in the sector were able to behave inappropriately without consequences, yet women were perceived as 'troublemakers' for wanting to distance themselves from inappropriate men.



'Reputations make and break people's entire [...] careers. Not if you're a man: you can fuck up as much as you like, and you just keep on [...] getting higher and higher and higher.'

Theme 7: Long-term impact of working in film exhibition

As discussed in Theme 1, work in the film exhibition sector can be challenging and often demands an intense level of commitment. This can be difficult to maintain alongside family responsibilities and other personal commitments. The insecure nature of the sector, where many rely on short-term freelance contracts, was highlighted consistently as an issue that affects everyone. However, some felt that, in the long term, the lack of stability disproportionately affected women, as there is no guarantee of maternity pay, and their pension contributions are most likely to be disrupted by having to take time out of employment to start a family.

Female participants who had worked in the sector for the longest reflected on trying to maintain their careers during transitional or particularly stressful periods (e.g. having children, caring for sick family members, trying to save to buy a property). Those newer to the sector were aware of the potential long-term challenges, even if they had not experienced them first-hand. One participant described the lack of statutory maternity pay in her short-term film festival contract as 'the biggest obstacle to [her] career', which would require her to save money for several years and stop working altogether to

start a family.

Female participants also reported that sustaining a long-term career in the sector was increasingly difficult as they became older. Menopause was especially viewed as a significant barrier for film festival staff. Respondents stated that the cognitive demand, long hours and intense nature of the work became notably more challenging when managing menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, sleep problems, and brain fog. They preferred to be close to home when dealing with these physical symptoms, which often clashed with the requirements of film festival work: working across multiple venue spaces, long hours, and being on their feet all day. The resulting fatigue made it even more challenging to juggle professional and personal responsibilities, causing some to question whether they could remain in the sector at all.



‘How do you do it? […] To raise your kids, be a parent, be present, run the business, go through perimenopause, look after your parents. How do you do it? Well, and be a person and have a relationship […] It’s just really difficult.’



‘The amount of women that are leaving the sector because they’re perimenopausal [is huge …] They feel like they can’t think, they can’t do their jobs properly anymore.’

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the reported experiences in this study, as well as our overview of Scotland's independent film exhibition sector, we propose several recommendations.

These recommendations have been divided into **recommendations for funders and sector stakeholders** and **recommendations for film exhibition organisations**. In doing so, we recognise that the remit, resources and scale of impact of these groups are vastly different. Ultimately, the section below lays out specific, positive interventions for the sector that stem from the research findings and should be viewed as directions for positive change, rather than demands.[33] These are intended to be used as prompts for the relevant organisations to reflect on their existing policies and practices to acknowledge what has already been achieved and what may still be improved or implemented.



The order of the suggestions below mirrors a film exhibition professional's journey through an industry role, from the moment of their recruitment to their mid-to-late career. This chronology highlights that there is room for positive change at each step of a professional's path. It also indicates that addressing gender inequities in Scotland's independent film exhibition sector requires a holistic endeavour comprising multiple incremental changes rather than a single intervention.

---

33 We acknowledge that Film Hub Scotland's co-authorship of this report makes our capacity to present recommendations nuanced, considering our own role in Scotland's film exhibition sector. The recommendations listed in this section stem naturally from the report, whose findings have been collected and interpreted by an independent researcher and thus do not represent a set of rigid expectations placed upon Film Hub Scotland members.

Recommendation cluster 1: Making recruitment more inclusive

For film exhibition organisations

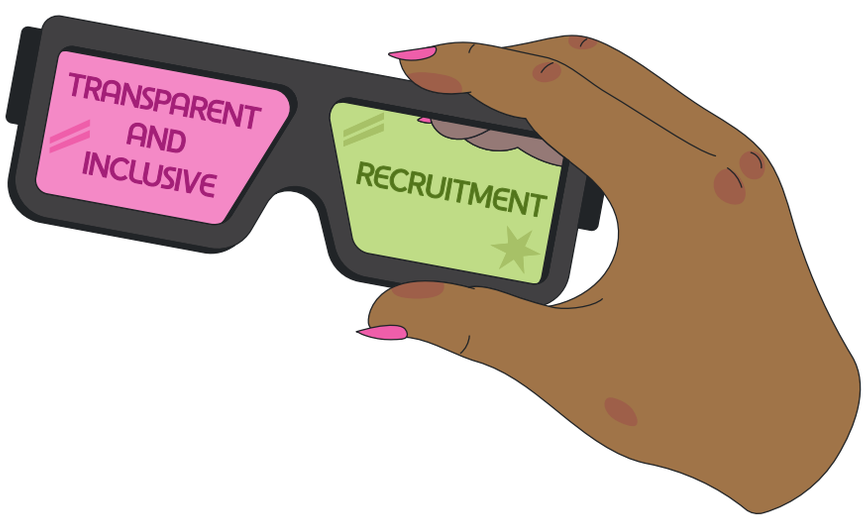
1. Avoid informal hiring networks in recruitment, require candidates to disclose conflicts-of-interest, and advertise new roles openly
2. Avoid pigeonholing and tokenism in staffing and recruitment based on assumed identity expertise

There are significant challenges associated with securing a role in the film exhibition sector, especially for new entrants and/or people from minoritised and marginalised backgrounds. Several interviewees noted the frequent use of informal recruitment networks as a major barrier to entering the sector. These networks, which rely on nepotism and direct appointments, can disadvantage those with no prior industry contacts. Those who are 'better-connected' within the sector were perceived to be more likely to be middle-class, white men who either had existing connections or were afforded the privilege to navigate these spaces with ease. By recruiting through personal contacts, organisations reduce the opportunity for certain demographic groups to take roles within the sector or progress to senior positions. They also risk alienating women and minoritised groups who, as our respondents identified, are less likely to be associated with professionalism and authority by male colleagues. 'Male-coded' workplace language present in informal hiring processes may further discriminate against women and minoritised groups.

There are existing legal regulations that require employers to maintain transparency during the recruitment and employment process, and many funders necessitate that their grant recipients develop or improve equitable, inclusive and open recruitment policies as part of their funding conditions. Nevertheless, there are scenarios where film exhibition organisations can go beyond the legal requirements and take a proactive stance in their efforts to widen the pool of applicants for their vacancies. When searching for a person to fill a freelance or fixed-term position, film exhibitors should consider going beyond their existing and personal networks to announce and advertise the

vacancy. If they have the capacity to do so, openly promoting vacancies to communities, organisations, and groups that are not already represented in the organisation's workforce or audience demographics would further enhance the visibility of sector roles for both new entrants and existing professionals with fewer industry contacts. In a general sense, we recommend film exhibitors to continuously reflect on whether their current approach to recruitment, including marketing and communication channels they use to advertise vacancies and interviewing, might be leading to a narrow pool of candidates who may fit the existing organisational culture but not add to it by bringing diverse perspectives and skills at all levels of seniority.

At the same time, interviewees from marginalised backgrounds described a sense that the film exhibition sector is preoccupied with public image, leading to tokenism and preventing meaningful integration, support, and progression of minoritised or marginalised persons. When a vacancy is to be advertised to a wide pool of applicants, the recruiting organisation should be mindful that the position is structured in such a way that the successful candidate would be genuinely supported and included during their employment, and that they are not going to be pigeonholed as experts in topics related to their lived experience as pertains to identity, ethnicity, race, or gender.



Recommendation cluster 2: Increasing transparency and facilitation of early-career progression opportunities

For funders and sector stakeholders

3 Link entry-level schemes (including internships and placements) with realistic and paid progression pathways

For film exhibition organisations

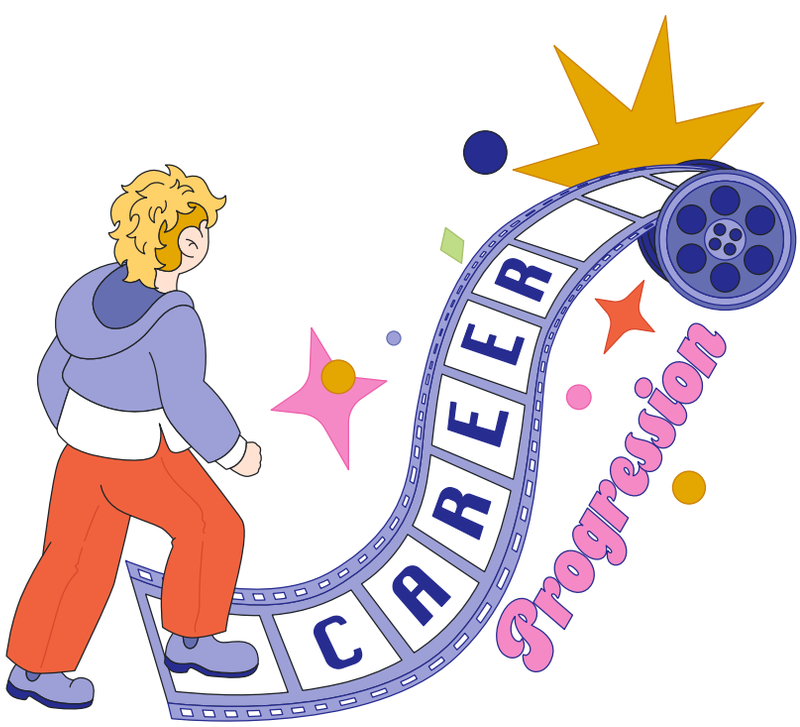
4 Make career progression pathways explicit and transparent, especially for early-career staff

According to our respondents, there are limited career progression opportunities in the Scottish film exhibition sector. With so many organisations operating non-commercially and relying on precarious project-to-project grants, there is a scarcity of mid-to-senior positions and a low staff turnover for those that do exist. UK-wide issues mentioned in the ICO Workforce Survey 2026, such as unclear progression routes and the concentration of vacancies to specific geographical areas, further exacerbate the situation. This can make the sector inhospitable to new entrants and early-career professionals and might mean that minoritised staff struggle to progress to mid-to-senior roles. Combined with domestic and caring responsibilities, which are disproportionately managed by women, the lack of clarity regarding career progression becomes a particularly detrimental barrier for women who want to plan their careers.

There is no straightforward solution to the issues of opaqueness and scarcity of career progression opportunities in the sector, and confronting this obstacle will require long-term effort from all stakeholders in Scottish film exhibition. A tangible growth in meaningful, paid, and lengthy employment opportunities is not likely in the immediate term. However, according to this research, increasing the transparency around realistic career progression possibilities for specific roles and internship schemes is a crucial first step in the right direction. We encourage film exhibition organisations to be mindful that prospective applicants are likely to hope that even expressly time-

limited opportunities may lead to long-term employment. With this in mind, employers should be open and transparent about the career progression pathways that their new hires and existing staff can expect. Where further opportunities are unlikely, limited, or non-existent, employers should carefully manage their applicants' expectations of progression to prevent individuals from entering the sector with an erroneous expectation of future opportunities. In these scenarios, film exhibitors should consider whether they might be able to offer alternative support to their staff and connect them with external opportunities in the sector (e.g. by encouraging them to attend industry events, providing training, or connecting them via their professional network).

The same recommendation applies to funders and sector stakeholders and intermediaries delivering or supporting various internship schemes and new entrant programmes, particularly if these are aimed at underrepresented and/or marginalised candidates. Future progression opportunities should be embedded in the design of these programmes at the earliest stages, informing their structure, partnerships, and marketing. For instance, training offered as part of entry-level schemes should be regularly updated to address in-demand skill gaps in the market. This will help prevent oversaturation of early-career professionals specialising exclusively in tasks demanded by highly competitive roles, such as programming and audience development.



We also encourage exploring dedicated mid-career support or funding that could provide more structured career pathways for professionals who struggle to progress after the entry-level threshold. Instead of addressing demographic underrepresentation in the Scottish film exhibition sector by focusing exclusively on new entrants to the sector, it is necessary to extend support to existing minoritised and/or marginalised professionals whom the sector is not successfully retaining. Some of our respondents noted that the lack of stable employment in the sector prevents them from accessing maternity pay or securing adequate pension contributions, which in turn impacts retention when they want to start a family or purchase a property. By developing mid-career opportunities and strengthening the early-to-mid-career talent pipeline, the sector would enable women to see working in independent film exhibition as a sustainable, long-term choice.

Recommendation cluster 3: Widening access to training, mentorship, and peer support

For funders and sector stakeholders

5 Host, support and signpost high-quality formal mentorship and leadership training for women and minoritised individuals in the film exhibition sector

6 Facilitate and promote peer-support networks for women working in the Scottish film exhibition sector

Our interviewees consistently highlighted the lack of access to training within the sector. They noted that increasing access to formal, skills-based training (i.e. training focused on practical and vocational skills applicable in the film exhibition sector, including the use of equipment) could generate more opportunities for women in technical roles. This is supported by the findings of the ICO Workforce Survey, which show a real demand for specialised training focused on technical skills: 'fundraising/sponsorship', 'projection/technical', and 'data analysis' were among the six most sought-after development areas for ICO's respondents.

Some key obstacles to accessing training in the sector include the lack of available funds to facilitate paid training opportunities, insufficient individual capacity to undertake training due to existing responsibilities, and limited availability of training in specific subject areas. On top of these challenges, women may encounter an additional barrier if, in a workplace dominated by patriarchal gender dynamics, a request for training is interpreted as indicative of lacking specialism, knowledge, or authority, exacerbating the prevalence of 'imposter syndrome'. Organisations should confront this discriminatory perception of training by encouraging all staff to regularly undertake professional development opportunities regardless of their level of experience or seniority. A more inclusive approach would be to challenge the notion that training 'solves the problem' of inadequate knowledge or lack of skillset and instead reframe it as a positive and proactive career development choice.

We recommend that sector stakeholders, intermediaries and funders explore the possibility of developing and hosting structured, formal training

opportunities that are attuned to the needs of the film exhibition sector. Bursaries could be offered for small non-profit organisations and individuals (including self-employed workers, parents and carers) whose time and budget constraints may prevent them from attending. We also note the need for further research on the types of training most beneficial to the independent film exhibition sector in Scotland. This could create new career pathways and resolve gaps in skills and knowledge.

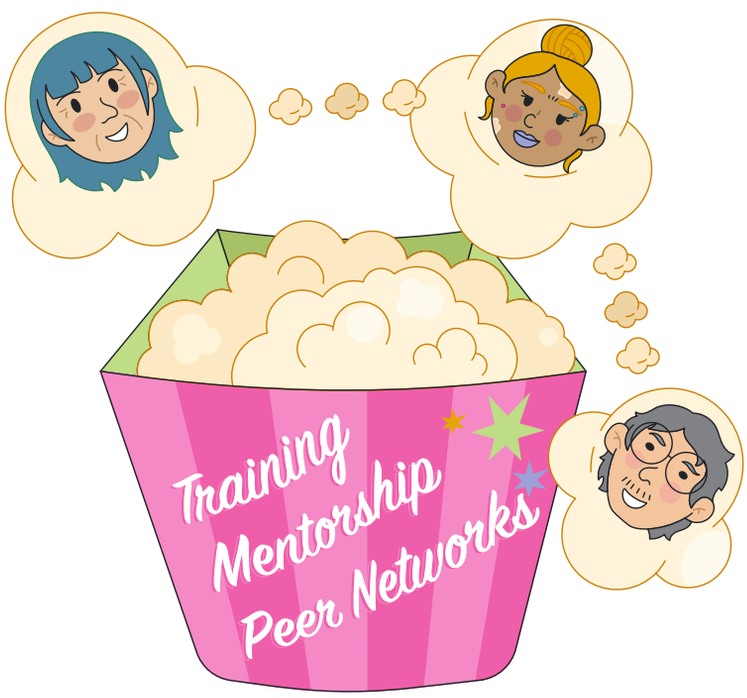
Female participants in our research consistently highlighted the positive impact of working alongside female colleagues, which gave them the opportunity to participate in informal mentorship with these peers. These peer-support networks also allow women and minoritised groups to collectively express their experience of barriers within the workplace, protecting individuals from potential repercussions for speaking out. We recommend that funders and sector bodies support the growth and development of such networks. This may involve establishing forums and facilitating spaces where women from various Scotland-based film exhibition organisations can share their experiences, exchange information, and offer support to one another. Funding could be allocated to external facilitators (providing a paid role for women within the sector) who could create a safe and encouraging environment by organising these networks independently from funders. This would be particularly useful for self-employed workers who lack access to workplace support groups.

In addition to formal training programmes, we also encourage local sector stakeholders to support and promote existing mentorship schemes that could benefit Scottish film exhibition workers by matching them with more experienced peers. Women in Film and Television UK (WFTV) organise an annual 'Scotland mentoring scheme', which connects successful applicants (film production or exhibition professionals with more than five years of experience) with experienced mentors to help them take the next step in their careers.[34] Supporting an expansion of this opportunity to allow more participation of both mentors and mentees from a film exhibition background, or an establishment of a similar programme in collaboration with WFTV or a relevant organisation, would be highly beneficial.

---

34 https://www.wftv.org.uk/scotland-mentoring-scheme

Other impactful initiatives supporting women in the Scottish film exhibition sector have been developed by Screen Argyll, who run the Sea Change Development Lab, Sea Change Connect, and Animated Women.[35] Championing these programmes by helping them expand their reach and remit and supporting their establishment of new initiatives would create more effective peer-support structures benefitting women working in film exhibition.



35 https://screenargyll.co.uk/sea-change-film-fest/
https://screenargyll.co.uk/sea-change-connect-online-programme/
https://screenargyll.co.uk/sea-change-animated-women/

Recommendation cluster 4: Researching rates of pay

For funders and sector stakeholders

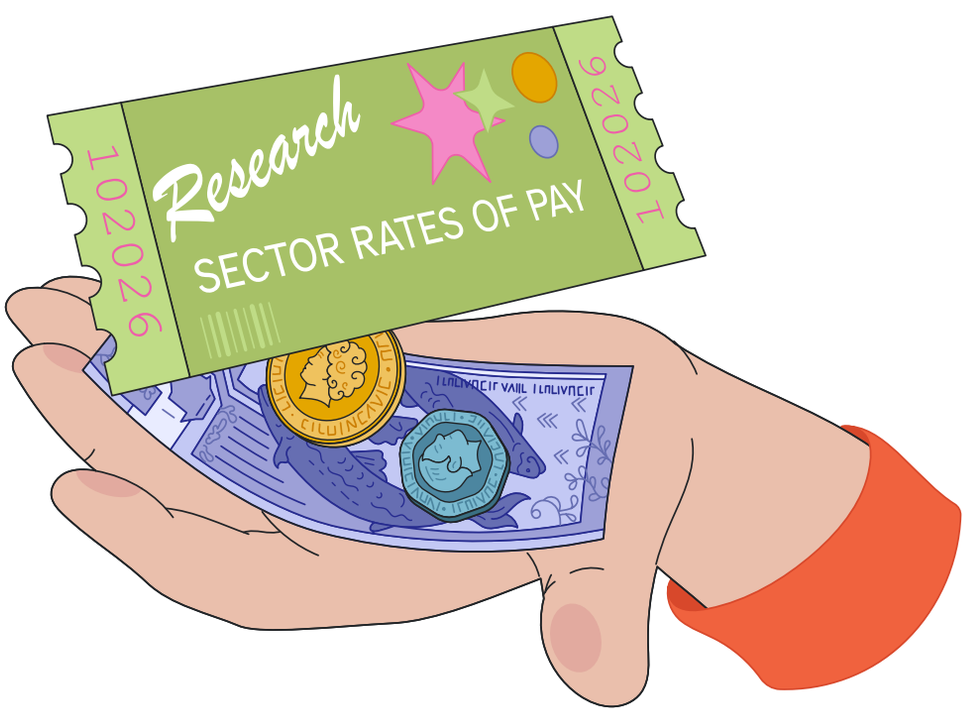
7 Conduct further research into the rates of pay in Scotland's film exhibition sector

Scotland does not have a union dedicated specifically to the film exhibition sector. While some of the sector's workforce, particularly front-of-house hospitality workers and technical crew, may be unionised with Unite Hospitality or BECTU, the full professional diversity of the film exhibition sector is not substantially represented within either union. Certain cinema and multi-arts venues have collective agreements in place with their unionised staff, but the sector at large is not represented by a sufficiently large association of employers which would have enabled BECTU to identify existing rates of remuneration and subsequently advocate for recommended ones.

In our survey, 54% of respondents perceived that the Scottish film exhibition sector has a gender pay gap. This was also reflected in interviews with participants. Several interviewees also brought up the fact that they had little factual knowledge of the average rates of remuneration for different positions across the sector, meaning that they could not ascertain whether they were paid fairly in their current role comparative to the rest of the national workforce.

Due to the film exhibition sector's heavy dependence on volunteering and short-term freelance contracts, as well as the prevalence of overworking – according to the ICO Workforce Survey 2026, 51% of UK film exhibition professionals work beyond their allocated hours 'always' or 'frequently' – gathering reliable data about the sector's real rates of pay will be a challenging task, requiring significant effort and resources and collaboration between the sector funders and stakeholders. Without this information, however, it is impossible to establish more granular details about the gender pay gap in the sector and identify whether it is localised in specific types of vacancies, levels of seniority, or regions of Scotland.

We recommend that a research project is commissioned within the next five years that specifically collects data about real rates of pay in Scotland's film exhibition sector, with support from industry stakeholders such as Film Hub Scotland and Screen Scotland (or Creative Scotland), who could facilitate the surveying of local film exhibition organisations. In the current sector, with its inconsistent HR function, low degree of engagement with unions by freelance film exhibition professionals, and no reliable information about salary scales or standard rates of pay, evaluating the extent to which gender equity has already been achieved is an impossible task.



Recommendation cluster 5: Ensuring adequate safeguarding measures and inclusive working policies

For funders and sector stakeholders

8 Actively signpost and promote external support and whistleblowing mechanisms for film exhibition workers

9 Develop and publish a hub of resources of good-practice workplace policies, including (peri-)menopause, family commitments and caring responsibilities

For film exhibition organisations

10 Designate safeguarding leads beyond line managers

11 Actively accommodate (peri-)menopause, family commitments, and caring responsibilities through formal inclusion policies and workplace support

Due to the lack of dedicated HR teams, and the fact that many Scottish film exhibition organisations are small and/or under-resourced, the sector faces significant workforce safeguarding risks. Although film exhibition professionals are protected by employment rights and statutory requirements, which mandate adequate safeguarding procedures and policies, many film exhibition organisations might not be sufficiently informed about the regular updates to UK employment law to deliver an appropriate level of support to their staff. In many small groups, a staff member's line manager will also act as their de facto HR support. This can create an imbalanced power dynamic, with few opportunities to report discriminatory, unlawful, and/or inappropriate behaviour. Several of our interviewees displayed an alarming sense of resignation about this.

According to our research, shortcomings in safeguarding disproportionately affect women and marginalised film exhibition professionals, who frequently struggle to find avenues where their concerns about specific incidents could be heard and addressed. These issues are compounded at film festivals due to

their high-pressure schedules and long hours. For film exhibition organisations with more than two employees, we recommend that each staff member is assigned with a designated safeguarding contact or lead who is not their line manager. In situations where this is not feasible, external support from industry stakeholders may be necessary, and staff are encouraged to consider requesting support from BECTU or Unite Hospitality as appropriate. Although neither organisation is uniquely dedicated to film exhibition, BECTU allows all creative industry workers to join and may provide crucial support in case of legal or pay disputes and provide qualified advice.

Developing a centralised avenue for reporting grievances would likely increase the level of safety and public accountability for the staff of small, grassroots and/or volunteer-run organisations making up a large proportion of the sector. However, since organisations such as Creative Scotland or Film Hub Scotland are not regulatory bodies, they are not able to establish, or act as, local industry channels or contacts for confidential reporting and whistleblowing for reasons both operational and legal. However, in June 2026, the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA) was formally recognised in UK Parliament as a 'Prescribed Person' for whistleblowing disclosures related to the film, television, music and theatre industries, gaining crucial legal status.[36] As an officially recognised whistleblowing body, CIISA will now be able to receive reports from workers even in cases where they have had to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements. CIISA began accepting whistleblowing reports in September 2026,[37] and we urge Scotland-based film exhibition organisations and industry stakeholders to actively inform their staff and the sector workforce about this independent reporting channel.

Relatedly, we recommend that industry stakeholders continue to develop dedicated resources and toolkits communicating up-to-date good practice relating to workplace policies and actively signposting existing external organisations able to offer support and protection to film exhibition workers. Film Hub Scotland could look to develop a resource hub to signpost existing

---

36 https://ciisa.org.uk/uncategorized/ciisa-formally-recognised-in-parliament-as-an-independent-whistle-blowing-body/

37 https://deadline.com/2026/05/ciisa-launch-whistleblowing-bullying-service september-1236901362/

resources and toolkits (e.g. CIISA, BECTU, Work Wise for Screen, Citizens Advice, ACAS, Film & TV Charity, etc.) and provide bespoke guidance to small, volunteer-run, grassroots film exhibition member organisations with limited resources around accommodating inclusive policies. This would be especially helpful for women working in the sector, who find opportunities for flexible working extremely useful, as they permit a better balance of their family and caring commitments with work and/or a more comfortable working environment for those experiencing (peri-)menopause.

Supporting small non-profit organisations to implement inclusive policies around flexible working would be particularly impactful for staff in the film festival sub-sector. Their intensive schedules and stressful, high-pressure work disproportionately affect women, making the prospect of working in festivals nearly unfeasible for those experiencing menopause and balancing significant caring and/or family responsibilities.



Conclusion

On local, national and global levels, the screen sector plays a critical role in shaping societal attitudes and combating stereotypes, particularly those related to gender. Ensuring women's participation in broader culture, including film exhibition, also serves as a cornerstone of primary prevention of violence against women and girls.[38] Intervention to decrease barriers for women in the film exhibition sector is essential.

This report has found that gender inequity in the Scottish film exhibition sector is primarily enabled through a combination of systemic factors, rather than direct exclusion, discrimination, or lack of entry opportunities. Although the latter barriers exist and should not be ignored, structural challenges such as lack of progression routes, general precarity, and insufficient organisational HR/governance capacity seem to have the strongest cumulative effect on gender inequity in Scotland's film exhibition.

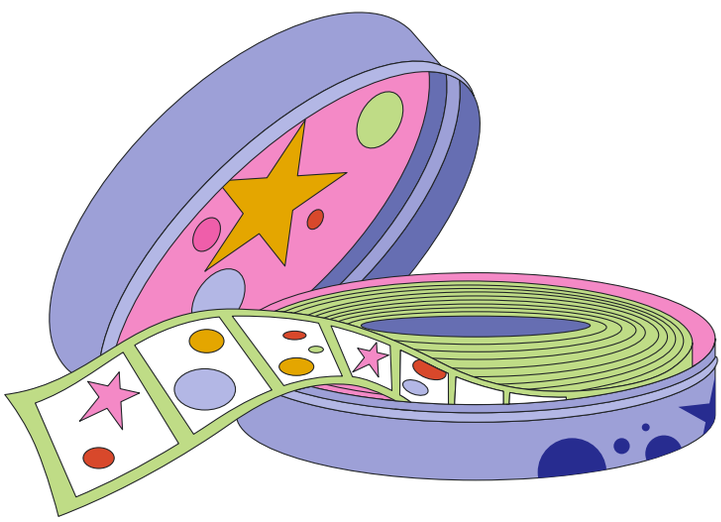
Many of these factors reproduce widespread challenges and issues affecting the creative industries at large. Low staff turnover, especially at senior positions, contributes to a sector where leadership roles are typically occupied by white cis-gendered men. Furthermore, lack of staff movement limits career progression opportunities for both early-career staff, impeding the positive impact of employment programmes specifically benefitting new entrants from underrepresented backgrounds.

The prevalence of short-term and poorly remunerated work disincentivises a more diverse pool of applicants from considering film exhibition roles, contributing to a sector where early-career employment is financially comfortable only for people from more affluent backgrounds. There is a widespread sense of scepticism about the fairness and impartiality of recruitment practices in film exhibition, with people regularly learning about, and taking, available roles thanks to informal personal connections with the hiring organisations; this prevents marginalised people with limited

38 https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/emcc-from-token-to-transformation-discussion-paper-january-2025.pdf

experience in the sector from gaining entry.

Once people are in employment, they sometimes find that they are insufficiently supported or protected by their organisations' safeguarding policies, which make it difficult for staff to understand their rights. Due to general precarity of the sector, few organisations have a dedicated HR department, driving a demand for external whistleblowing and reporting channels. In the absence of any internal or external support structures, discriminatory behaviour would remain unreported and unaddressed.



Women from marginalised backgrounds face significant challenges due to limited training and development opportunities. This makes it difficult for them to enhance their skills and access the same opportunities as male colleagues from wealthier backgrounds. Additionally, there is a workplace issue around the patriarchal perception that women's need for training is a sign of incompetency, whereas, for men, it is viewed as inevitable to growth. Whilst film exhibition workers value support from empathetic colleagues, the presence of patriarchal gender dynamics, which intersect with other identity aspects like ethnicity, continue to lead to uncomfortable or undermining interactions with male colleagues.

These issues are neither unique to the film exhibition sector, nor exclusively related to gender inequity, but their impact on women working in Scottish film exhibition is amplified in the film festival sub-sector. The demanding nature of film festivals, characterised by high intensity, irregular schedules,

and a fast-paced work environment in preparation for complex public events, can make it challenging for individuals with caring or family responsibilities and women experiencing (peri-)menopause to stay in the sector over long periods of time. In festivals and the broader film exhibition industry, flexible work arrangements are thus a highly effective means of enhancing job satisfaction and supporting women and individuals from marginalised backgrounds.

We have presented several recommendations to encourage diversity, actively support women and other minoritised groups, and lay the groundwork for meaningful improvements in gender equity in the Scottish film exhibition sector. We recognise that existing constraints on funders and sector stakeholders make it challenging to assign actions to all recommendations. We hope this report acts as a call to action that raises genuine interest in creating meaningful change that goes beyond existing limitations.

Thanks to the generous sharing of perspectives of our respondents, our suggestions have been informed by the views of people working in the sector. Future initiatives to support gender equity should continue to place lived experience of minoritised individuals at the heart of these efforts.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Online survey participant profile

In total, 101 people took part in the survey. Most had worked in the sector for 1 to 5 years (39.6%). However, a substantial proportion had worked in the sector for 5 to 10 (22.77%) and over 10 years (29.7%).

Most identified as female (65.35%), 23.76% identified as male, and 6.93% identified as non-binary or gender queer.

The majority (70.29%) were aged between 25 and 44. A smaller proportion (22%) were aged between 45 and 54, and 8% were aged between 55 and 65, and over.

A small proportion (5.94%) reported that their gender differed from assigned at birth. Just over half of (54.46%) identified as straight or heterosexual, whereas 17.82% identified as bisexual, and 11.88% identified as gay or lesbian.

The majority (62.5%) said that they did not identify as disabled or have a long-term physical or mental health condition.

Most participants (83.16%) were of white ethnicity, and a smaller proportion (10.89%) reported mixed ethnicity.

Age (Total = 101)	
Under 18	0
18-24	0
25-34	39 (38.61%)
35-44	32 (31.68%)
45-54	22 (21.78%)
55-64	6 (5.94%)
65+	2 (1.98%)
Prefer not to say	0

Gender (Total = 101)

Woman (including trans woman)	66 (65.35%)
Man (including trans man)	24 (23.76%)
Non-binary / Gender Queer	7 (6.93%)
Prefer to self-identify	1 (0.99%)
Prefer not to say	1 (0.99%)
Prefer to self-identify	2 (1.98%)

Are you the same gender as assigned to you at birth? (Total = 101)

Yes	93 (92.08%)
No	6 (5.94%)
Prefer not to say	2 (1.98%)

Sexual identity (Total = 101)

Asexual	0
Bisexual	18 (17.82)
Gay Man	4 (3.96%)
Gay Woman/Lesbian	8 (7.92%)
Straight/Heterosexual	55 (54.46%)
Queer	8 (7.92%)
Prefer to self-identify	4 (3.96%)
Prefer not to say	6 (5.94%)

Do you relate to any of these statements? (You can choose more than one) (Total = 72)

I am a Disabled person	5 (6.94%)
I have a disability	4 (5.56%)
I have a long-term health condition	7 (9.72%)
I have a mental health condition	6 (8.33%)

When you were 14, what did the main income earner in your household do for a living? (Total = 101)

Modern professional & traditional professional occupations such as: teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil / mechanical engineer.	42 (41.58%)
Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators such as: finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager.	24 (23.76%)
Clerical and intermediate occupations such as: secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker, nursery nurse.	4 (3.96%)
Technical and craft occupations such as: motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver.	10 (9.90%)
Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations such as: postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff.	8 (7.92%)
Long-term unemployed (claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year)	2 (1.98%)
Small business owners who employed less than 25 people such as: corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner.	7 (6.93%)
This question does not apply due to being care experienced	0
Don't know	1 (0.99%)
Prefer not to say	2 (1.98%)
Other	1 (0.99%)

What type of school did you mainly attend between the ages of 11 and 16? (Total = 101)

Attended school outside the UK	17 (16.83%)
Independent or fee-paying school – bursary	4 (3.96%)
Independent or fee-paying school – no bursary	11 (10.89%)
State-run or state-funded school – non-selective	56 (55.45%)
State-run or state-funded school – selective on academic, faith or other grounds	11 (10.89%)
Don't know	0
Other	1 (0.99%)
Prefer not to say	2 (1.98%)

Which of these options best describes your ethnic origin or background? (Total = 101)

Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British (Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British)	1 (0.99%)
Any other Asian background	1 (0.99%)
White (Scottish)	45 (44.55%)
White (Gypsy/Traveller)	2 (1.98%)
White (Irish)	4 (3.96%)
White (Polish)	1 (0.99%)
Any other White background	32 (31.68%)
African (African, African Scottish or African British)	1 (0.99%)
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (Asian and White)	3 (2.97%)
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (Black Caribbean and White)	1 (0.99%)
Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background	7 (6.93%)
Jewish	1 (0.99%)
Any other ethnic group	1 (0.99%)
Prefer not to say	1 (0.99%)

Appendix 2: Semi-structured topic guide

The interviews were conducted following a semi-structured topic guide. The researcher adapted the order of the questions depending on the individual and asked additional questions where needed.

The topic guide was sent to participants before the interview to ensure they knew what to expect and to give them the opportunity to raise any potential concerns.

1. Can you tell me about your role in the Scottish film sector?

2. We're interested to know how gender and other characteristics might impact people's experiences of working in the sector. What are your thoughts on that? Whether it's your own experience, or your observations.

3. We're interested in anything employers have put in place to make working in the sector more open and accessible to people. What's your experience of that?

4. What sort of policies might be helpful to you or others to working in the sector, in terms of making it accessible and promoting equity for different groups of people?

This report was prepared by Film Hub Scotland and the Equal Media & Culture Centre for Scotland at Engender.
Published November 2026.

About EMCC:
The Equal Media & Culture Centre for Scotland (EMCC) is housed within Engender. Engender is a registered charity in Scotland no SC029053.

Emcc@engender.org.uk

www.emcc.engender.org.uk

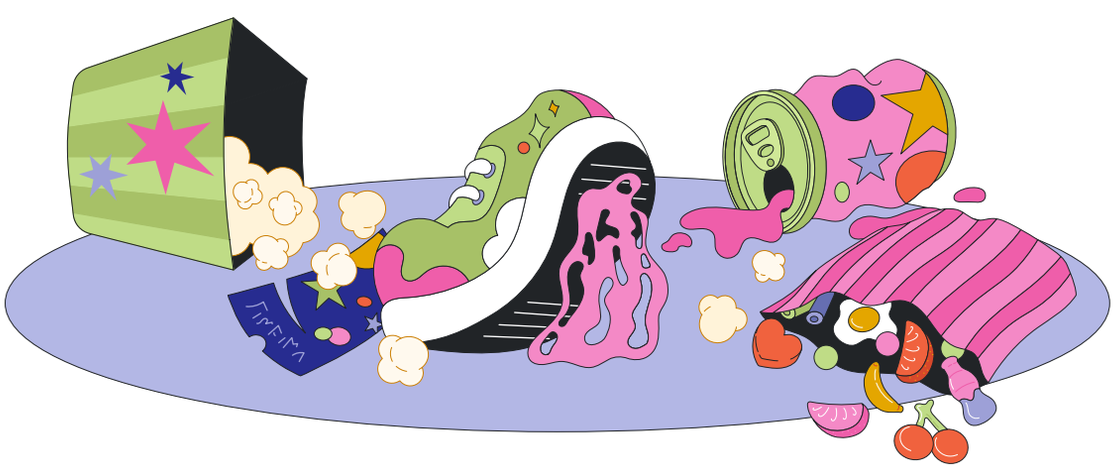
@emcc.scot

About Film Hub Scotland
Delivered by Glasgow Film, Film Hub Scotland is part of the BFI Film Audience Network and is supported by the BFI and Screen Scotland, both awarding National Lottery funding.

info@filmhubscotland.com

www.filmhubscotland.com

@filmhubscotland



EQUAL MEDIA & CULTURE CENTRE FOR SCOTLAND

Film Hub Scotland