

FACTSHEET PRODUCED BY SKILLSET AND EQUITY

Walk On and Supporting Artist

Walk On and Supporting Artists are employed on Film and Television productions, and may also work as other kinds of performers, or in a variety of occupations outside the media industries, when not involved in shoots. They are selected, or cast, by Casting Directors or Casting Agencies. Although the work is mostly sporadic, and they may be asked to work at very short notice, if they are employed on continuing drama series, or soaps, they can make a good living.

What is the job?

Walk Ons and Supporting Artists are employed to provide background action on film and television productions. They may be directed by First or Second Assistant Directors, and must be prepared to spend long hours waiting on set or on location until they are needed for shots. They are sometimes asked to deliver small amounts of dialogue. They must be aware that others contribute to the process, e.g., those working in the Make Up, Costume, and Design teams, and that they may be serviced by a host of others in terms of transport, catering, etc., but that they are responsible for their own performance on set.

Typical career routes

Walk Ons and Supporting Artists come from a variety of backgrounds, and it is difficult to pinpoint any specific career route. Many work in other occupations, and may have some background in amateur theatre, or they may be professional Performers. They are usually registered with Agencies who specialise in this area. There are no guarantees of work, or work progression, for Walk Ons and Supporting Artists.

Essential knowledge and skills

Walk Ons and Supporting Artists should be aware of the professional etiquette and traditions of working on film and television sets and locations,

and of the importance of interacting at appropriate times, and with the relevant people, so that they do not affect the smooth running of the shoot. They should be aware of continuity requirements, and must be prepared to accept direction, and to respond to requests quickly and without fuss. To assist with continuity, Walk Ons and Supporting Artists need to remember their exact positions and movements at any given time during the performance. They may also need to continually hit their marks on set, without looking down to locate them. They must be infinitely adaptable, as they may find themselves in many different productions over a short period of time. They need to convince the audience that they are believable in all their roles. They must be uninhibited, in order to temporarily assume other identities, and also to be made up, dressed, positioned and directed by others. For some productions, singing or dancing skills may be required, and other specific physical skills are sometimes needed. If they are required to deliver any lines, they must be able to learn and retain them quickly, and to deliver them as directed. They also need to be aware of how their performance may be affected by: the types and positions of microphones, cameras and cables; different lighting techniques; and the requirements of different sets and locations.

Key skills include:

- An understanding of the production process
- Patience
- Effective communication skills
- Knowledge of the requirements of the relevant Health and Safety legislation and procedures

Training and qualifications

No specific qualifications are required for Walk Ons and Supporting Artists, although some may have attended drama schools, or taken acting lessons. Acknowledged industry experience, good industry contacts, and a proven track record of reliability, are often the most valued qualifications.

Individual course accreditation in certain subject areas is currently being piloted. As part of Skillset's and the UK Film Council's Film Skills Strategy, *A Bigger Future*, a network of Screen Academies and a Film Business Academy

have been approved as centres of excellence in education and training for film. For more information, please log onto the Skillset website.

Where to go for more information

Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Audio Visual Industries. The first sources of information for all jobs in the industry are the [National Occupational Standards](#). For information about training, links to the Skillset network of training partners, and access to the comprehensive [Skillset/BFI course database](#), visit the website www.skillset.org. Skillset Careers is the UK's only specialist media careers advice service; for detailed media careers information and advice, visit the website www.skillset.org/careers.

Equity is the trade union representing artists across the whole spectrum of arts and entertainment, and offers representation, specialist knowledge and advice for its members and student members on work in Film, Television, Radio, and other Live Performance. T: 020 7379 6000. www.equity.org.uk.

The Broadcasting and Entertainment Trade Union **BECTU**, offers advice about employment terms and rights and useful information on health and safety. The Film Artistes Association FAA, which represents background artists working on UK film and television shoots, is a sub division of BECTU. T: 020 7346 0900 www.bectu.org.uk

BBC www.bbc.co.uk offers a wealth of information about careers and training in the media. BBC Talent runs talent spotting schemes www.bbc.co.uk/talent

The Stage newspaper is the entertainment trade weekly. Recruitment advertisements, useful links, and 'how to guides', such as finding an agent or drama school, are on its website www.thestage.co.uk

Contacts is published annually by The Spotlight, and provides details of all aspects of the entertainment industry. www.spotlight.com