Artificial Intelligence and the Future of UK Screen-Based Media Production: A Position Paper for Higher Education

This position paper was prepared by Dr Roy Hanney with the assistance of OpenAI's ChatGPT, which was used to synthesise literature, draft sections, and support editing. All content was reviewed, edited, and approved by the author.

Abstract

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) across the screen-based creative industries is reconfiguring production workflows, reshaping occupational roles, and redefining skills needs. This position paper reviews recent literature (2023–2025) to examine these transformations with a particular focus on the UK context. It responds directly to the Working with AI *study (Han et al., 2025), which provides a robust empirical benchmark for understanding the current state of AI integration in creative production environments. Drawing on academic research, grey literature, and UK policy and union positions, the review identifies generative AI as a catalyst for significant change in pre-production research, administrative processes, and aspects of post-production. While automation potential remains limited for core creative decision-making, AI is emerging as a powerful augmentative tool, enhancing efficiency and enabling new modes of creative collaboration. The analysis foregrounds the implications for Higher Education (HE) in the UK, highlighting the urgent need to adapt curricula, assessment strategies, and industry engagement to ensure graduates are prepared for an AI-enabled production landscape.*

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of UK Screen-Based Media Production: Implications for Higher Education

Executive Summary

This position paper examines the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on employment, workflows, and skills in the UK's screen-based creative industries, with a focus on production contexts. Prompted by the recent study *Working with AI* (Han et al., 2025), it synthesises literature, policy developments, and union positions from 2023 onwards to identify predicted impacts and propose an action plan for Higher Education (HE).

Context

Generative AI is rapidly embedding itself in UK production processes. Its strengths lie in accelerating research, writing, communication, scheduling, and certain post-production tasks. However, the speed of adoption raises urgent questions around performer rights, provenance, disclosure, and ethical use — areas where UK regulators (Ofcom), unions (Equity), and industry bodies (Pact) have begun to establish guidance.

Key Findings

- *Pre-production*: AI excels in idea generation, research synthesis, and visual concepting, shortening development cycles but introducing copyright and originality risks.
- *Production management*: Scheduling, budgeting, and call sheet generation are increasingly AI-assisted. UK production companies are already testing automated tools for logistics, though human oversight remains essential.
- *Post-production*: AI supports editing, colour grading, and sound design, improving turnaround times but raising issues of authorship, creative control, and disclosure.
- *Cross-cutting legal and ethical issues*: Performer likeness rights, data minimisation, and provenance tracking are becoming central to compliance and trust. Sector guidance now recommends clear contractual clauses and audit trails for AI-generated or altered content.

Predicted Impacts on Roles and Skills

Junior roles such as runners and researchers are being redefined into AI-augmented researcher positions, requiring strong verification, fact-checking, and rights-clearance skills. Editorial judgement, ethical literacy, and policy awareness will be as important as technical proficiency. The creative decision-making process remains human-led, but AI is becoming a standard collaborative tool.

Recommendations for Higher Education

The paper proposes a four-pillar action plan:

1. *Embed AI literacy*: Teach prompt-to-pipeline craft, disclosure protocols, provenance awareness, and ethical decision-making within production curricula.
2. *Redesign assessments*: Require students to log and disclose AI assistance in pre-production, production, and post-production work.

3. *Build industry partnerships*: Co-develop training with unions, regulators, and producers to align graduate skills with evolving practice and compliance requirements.
4. *Invest in staff development*: Ensure teaching teams have the technical and policy knowledge to guide responsible AI use.

Conclusion

AI is no longer an experimental novelty in UK media production; it is an embedded component of workflows. The *Working with AI* study underscores that AI is most effective as a collaborator rather than a replacement for human creativity and judgement. UK HE institutions have an opportunity — and a responsibility — to shape graduates who are not only fluent in AI tools but also equipped to navigate the legal, ethical, and creative challenges of this evolving landscape.

By acting now, HE can ensure its graduates lead rather than follow the transformation of UK screen-based media production.

1. Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into creative production has accelerated markedly since 2022, driven by advances in large language models (LLMs), generative visual systems, and automation tools capable of handling increasingly complex media tasks. In the UK's screen-based creative industries—including film, television, animation, and games—AI is now a substantive presence in pre-production, production management, and post-production processes (Ofcom, 2024; Pact, 2023). This shift raises critical questions for employment, professional practice, and the future configuration of skills pipelines. For Higher Education institutions charged with preparing graduates for these industries, the challenge is twofold: to understand the pace and scope of technological change, and to respond with pedagogical and structural strategies that ensure students can thrive in an AI-augmented creative economy.

This paper takes as its immediate stimulus the *Working with AI* study (Han et al., 2025), an empirical investigation into how AI is currently deployed in creative production workflows. The study's findings—particularly its mapping of occupational tasks against AI strengths and weaknesses—offer a clear, evidence-based vantage point from which to assess the present moment. In a technological landscape characterised by rapid iteration and shifting norms, such grounded research is vital for moving beyond speculative claims toward actionable insight.

The *Working with AI* paper also intersects with pressing debates in the UK concerning the regulation of generative AI, performer rights, provenance standards, and disclosure requirements (Ofcom, 2024; Equity, 2023; DCMS, 2023). These debates are shaping not only industry standards but also the skill sets that will be expected of future creative workers. By synthesising the *Working with AI* findings with recent academic studies, industry reports, and policy statements, this paper aims to identify key predicted impacts on production workflows, roles, and skills—and to propose a targeted plan of action for UK Higher Education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The *Working with AI* study

The *Working with AI* paper (Han et al., 2025) provides a detailed examination of AI integration across a range of creative and media-related occupations. Using a task-level analysis framework informed by the US O*NET[1] database, the authors assess the extent to which AI can perform or augment specific activities. Their findings indicate that AI shows particularly high performance in tasks related to research, writing, communication, and information synthesis—areas highly relevant to pre-production in media industries. Conversely, tasks requiring nuanced creative judgment, interpersonal negotiation, or embodied performance remain largely resistant to automation.

One of the study's key contributions is the conceptual framing of "prompt-to-pipeline" workflows, where human operators use AI iteratively to generate content, manage version control, and conduct final editorial review. This model positions AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as an accelerant that, when properly integrated, can improve efficiency without displacing core creative decision-making. Importantly, the authors also emphasise the need for disclosure and logging of AI assistance within production documentation, anticipating emerging regulatory requirements in multiple jurisdictions.

2.2 AI adoption in UK screen-based production

Recent UK-specific reports corroborate the *Working with AI* study's observation that AI adoption is most advanced in pre-production and administrative domains. Ofcom's (2024) review of generative AI in broadcasting and media notes that UK production companies are using AI to streamline research, generate storyboards, produce draft scripts, and automate scheduling and call sheet generation. However, Ofcom cautions that reliance on AI without human oversight risks propagating bias, factual inaccuracy, and rights infringements.

Union and trade body positions also frame the UK discourse. Equity (2023) has called for explicit contractual clauses governing the use of performer likenesses, voices, and motion data, while Pact (2023) has emphasised the need for transparency in AI-assisted production processes. These positions, while protective of creative labour, also signal new compliance burdens for producers and, by extension, for graduates entering the field.

2.3 International comparisons and transferable insights

International studies offer a useful comparative lens. For example, the OECD (2024) highlights that AI-related workflow changes in Canada and Australia mirror UK trends, with junior roles such as researchers and runners increasingly expected to combine traditional organisational skills with AI-augmented data gathering and verification. In the US, the Writers Guild of America (2023) has negotiated contractual language specifying that AI-generated material cannot be considered literary material for credit purposes, reinforcing the principle of human authorship—an issue equally salient in the UK.

[1] O*NET (Occupational Information Network) is a U.S. Department of Labor database providing standardized occupational descriptors, including tasks, skills, knowledge areas, and work activities for a wide range of professions. It is widely used in workforce planning, curriculum development, and skills mapping.

2.4 Skills and training needs

Across the literature, there is strong consensus that AI literacy is becoming an essential component of creative production skills. This includes prompt engineering, critical evaluation of AI outputs, understanding provenance technologies, and navigating rights and ethics (Ofcom, 2024; Han et al., 2025). Several sources also highlight the importance of "operational integration" skills: the ability to deploy AI in administrative processes such as risk assessments, post-production logging, and delivery documentation, while maintaining human sign-off for quality assurance.

The *Working with AI* study's alignment of AI strengths with O*NET-style activity classifications provides a concrete framework for curriculum adaptation in Higher Education. By mapping existing modules to these task categories, institutions can identify where AI-related competencies can be embedded without displacing core creative skills.

3. Key Predicted Impacts on Workflows, Roles, and Skills

3.1 Pre-production acceleration and transformation

Generative AI is most advanced in pre-production, where tasks such as script development, visual concept generation, and location research can now be undertaken at unprecedented speed. The *Working with AI* study (Han et al., 2025) identifies a high potential for AI to augment research, writing, and communication activities—functions that map directly onto tasks undertaken by development researchers and assistant producers.

In the UK, several independent production companies have reported using AI to create first-draft scripts, character profiles, or treatment outlines, with human writers then refining these into production-ready formats. The BFI/CoSTAR (2025) Foresight Lab report highlights that Hat Trick Lab has adopted generative AI for pitch deck creation as a common "entry point" to adoption (p.14). The BBC has implemented a structured "scan → pilot → scale" programme, commissioning 12 generative AI pilots, some of which were fast-tracked into production where they proved viable (p.17). Beyond development, the BFI National Archive uses LLMs and vision models to transcribe, subtitle, and enrich metadata for improved accessibility and discovery (p.16), while the BBFC has developed an AI content-tagging tool in partnership with Innovate UK and AWS (pp.34–35). In each case, human oversight remains central to compliance with editorial guidelines and rights protection.

Implications: These developments are likely to reshape junior research roles into AI-augmented research and verification positions, demanding both technical fluency in prompt engineering and editorial skills in fact-checking, rights clearance, and bias mitigation.

3.2 Production management and operational efficiency

AI is increasingly being applied to administrative and coordination functions such as scheduling, call sheet generation, and risk assessment. Ofcom (2024) notes that some UK drama productions have integrated AI scheduling tools that cross-reference cast availability, location permits, and budget constraints to produce optimised shooting plans. In one London-based indie, such tools reduced pre-shoot scheduling from a fortnight to under a week, though final approval still rested with a human production manager.

Implications: While these tools increase efficiency, they also introduce new competencies: production coordinators will need to understand how to audit AI outputs for feasibility, compliance, and equity (e.g. avoiding patterns that disproportionately disadvantage certain crew members). This suggests a curricular need for "operational integration" skills—how to deploy AI for efficiency while ensuring human oversight and accountability.

3.3 Post-production augmentation

AI is also altering post-production, especially in media logging, transcription, and basic editing. Automated speech-to-text systems now integrate with editing software to create searchable transcripts, allowing editors to work more quickly. However, Equity (2023) warns that AI-generated voice replication and image synthesis in post-production pose significant risks to performer rights, especially where likenesses or performances are altered without consent.

Implications: Post-production roles will require stronger legal and ethical literacy alongside technical skills, particularly in understanding contractual clauses on performer likeness and synthetic media.

3.4 Cross-cutting legal, ethical, and provenance concerns

Emerging UK policy emphasises transparency, rights protection, and provenance tracking. Ofcom (2024) is consulting on requirements for AI-assisted content disclosure, while Pact (2023) advises producers to maintain detailed "AI assistance logs" for deliverables. This is reinforced by calls from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) for investment in provenance technologies such as watermarking and blockchain certification.

Implications: AI provenance literacy—knowing how to document, disclose, and verify AI-assisted content—will become a core competency. For HE, this means integrating rights, ethics, and provenance training across production modules.

4. Plan of Action for UK Higher Education

4.1 Embed AI literacy across curricula

HE institutions should incorporate "prompt-to-pipeline" workflows into teaching, reflecting industry practice where briefs are translated into prompts, outputs are version-controlled, and human editorial review is mandatory (Han et al., 2025). Students should learn to identify which tasks are AI-appropriate and how to integrate them into a production process without compromising creative integrity.

Example: In a television development module, students could be tasked with generating a research dossier using AI tools, followed by a mandatory human verification and rights clearance stage, with marks awarded for both technical execution and editorial judgement.

4.2 Teach rights, ethics, and disclosure as applied practice

Curricula should go beyond theoretical ethics to applied rights management, aligning with Equity's and Pact's positions. This includes training in performer likeness clauses, consent protocols, data minimisation, and AI disclosure logs.

Example: A film production course could include a simulated contract negotiation where students must insert and defend AI usage clauses, followed by producing an AI-assisted short sequence with a disclosure log.

4.3 Develop operational integration competencies

Students should gain hands-on experience using AI for operational tasks such as scheduling, call sheets, and risk assessments. This should be paired with training in error detection, equity impact assessment, and human sign-off procedures.

Example: In a production management workshop, students could compare a human-created and AI-generated shooting schedule, identifying risks, omissions, and ethical considerations before recommending a final plan.

4.4 Build provenance and detection literacy

HE should teach students the limitations of AI detectors, the basics of watermarking, and how to integrate provenance tools into workflows. This anticipates a regulatory environment in which disclosure and traceability will be routine compliance requirements.

Example: A post-production module could require students to embed metadata or watermarks into AI-assisted assets and produce an audit trail for delivery to a mock broadcaster.

4.5 Reframe and protect entry-level roles

Given AI's encroachment on repetitive tasks, HE must prepare students for redefined entry roles where value lies in verification, rights clearance, and creative decision-making rather than rote data gathering.

Example: In work placement schemes, universities could encourage industry partners to create "AI-augmented researcher" placements, focusing on synthesis, fact-checking, and ethical compliance.

4.6 Upskill staff and align research

To deliver this agenda, academic staff require ongoing professional development in AI tools, policy developments, and ethical frameworks. Partnerships with industry can ensure alignment with current practice and emerging standards.

5. Discussion

The reviewed literature makes clear that AI is not simply automating existing workflows but restructuring them in ways that elevate the importance of human oversight, editorial judgement, and ethical literacy. This has significant implications for employability: graduates who can combine AI fluency with strong creative and legal/ethical competencies will be at a competitive advantage.

For HE, the challenge is to respond at pace. AI integration into production is happening faster than traditional curriculum review cycles, and without deliberate intervention, there is a risk of skills mismatch. Industry collaboration will be essential, both to inform

curriculum design and to ensure that work placements and live briefs reflect AI-augmented production realities.

There is also an opportunity for HE to lead in shaping best practice. By embedding disclosure norms, provenance tracking, and rights-conscious workflows in graduate training, universities can help set standards that protect creative labour and uphold quality, influencing industry practice from the bottom up.

6. Conclusion

Generative AI is already materially altering UK screen-based creative production, particularly in pre-production research, production management, and aspects of post-production. While it has not replaced core creative authorship, it is accelerating workflows and shifting skill demands toward AI fluency, legal/ethical literacy, and operational integration.

For UK Higher Education, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity: to equip graduates with the hybrid skills needed for an AI-enabled industry, and to play a proactive role in defining responsible, transparent, and rights-respecting AI practices. By embedding AI literacy, provenance awareness, and ethical frameworks into curricula now, HE can ensure that the next generation of creative professionals are not only employable but also capable of leading the industry's AI transition.

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