

Emma Feely and
Alister Smith working
on the AMI Awards



There's no camera training in the industry any more

Well... that is the general perception. But the good news is, it's not strictly true, as GTC Council Member Chris Owen, Head of Cameras and Sound at ITV's The London Studios, explains.

It may come as a surprise to some who assume that organised training basically ended with the casualisation of most TV companies, but in fact ITV runs a flourishing work experience scheme called ITV Insight. For the London area, The London Studios (TLS), based on the South Bank, is fully committed to playing its part in this by giving access to its very experienced team, studio facilities, kit and equipment, to interested young people. Placements are normally six weeks long and give candidates an excellent insight into TV production.

For the longer term, the TLS team also has a very positive attitude to on-the-job training and a good relationship with colleges up and down the country, which provide suitable candidates for consideration for employment, attachments or shorter periods of work experience.

Currently, there are 15 staff camera assistants in the department, who can be scheduled onto every type of programme at TLS. Their training comprises shadowing for familiarisation at first, which then leads on to regular cable clearing and finally individual training sessions on both pedestal and handheld cameras.

Two or three times a year, not-for-broadcast training projects will take place, which regularly attain such high standards the output could easily be transmitted. These are supported by industry professional directors, vision-mixers and PAs.

When the operating level of the assistants has reached a required standard, they are 'double crewed' with operators, meaning they can operate on suitable shows under one-to-one supervision to gain experience and confidence. They then work up to the position of senior assistant, then operating on the less complex shows, and finally to being a full camera operator.

Something of a rarity these days, TLS still has a career 'ladder', comprising No 3, No 2 and senior cameraman. With the company's commitment to training the camera operators of the future, everything from gas bottle safety to Jimmy Jib operation will be covered when possible, with rare quiet moments in the schedule often filled with a training day. For Zerb, GTC member Kris Winser, a No 3 cameraman at TLS, has compiled the following impressions from current camera assistants in the department.

James Mackenzie Robinson

"As a new camera assistant at TLS, being given the opportunity in my first year to operate a ped and show my creativity in a professional studio environment, using the best camera equipment available, is something I don't believe could be achieved anywhere else. The music training day I attended was run at a fully professional level in all aspects, showing the confidence and commitment the camera department has in us all as new assistants.

The willingness to teach and to share experience from all the camera department and right through the company, from lighting to set design and production, is fantastic. The end product was easily broadcast quality and would happily compete with any current music show in the marketplace. I believe I speak for all my assistant colleagues when I

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Chloe Mourant operating on the Children's BAFTAs



Tom Wisdom on the AMI Awards

say we are extremely grateful for the top-rate training we receive on a daily basis from our team-mates and seniors within the department."

Jamie Sullivan

"I've found there have been a lot of opportunities to train in various camera disciplines. One that stood out for me was the music training day that was organised in-house. I put myself forward as the camera supervisor, which involved attending production meetings and liaising with other departments. Several staff assistants took different roles under the supervision of TLS camera operators. As the senior, I encountered issues that I would never have thought of beforehand. Not only was the day enjoyable, but it opened my eyes to the needs of an operator and the importance of the assisting role."

Chloe Mourant

"During the children's BAFTAs, I operated a handheld camera in amongst the tables of the nominees. This gave me the chance to feel the real pressure of being an operator for the first time, knowing I had to get the shots required. This was such good training as you really have to think like an operator, concentrating on holding the shot, what can possibly go wrong and how to get into position for the next shot, while all the time being aware of not getting in the way of other operators. Putting it into practice makes everything you've been told make sense. I really enjoyed the hands-on experience and believe it's the best possible way of training."

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Greg Firth

"While I was studying Broadcast Operations at Ravensbourne University, I was accepted onto a six-week summer placement at TLS, working with cameras, lighting and sound. From this, I was lucky enough to be remembered and asked to come along to the Children's BAFTAs as a camera assistant; I spent the day assisting one of the busy handheld cameras. All the camera operators were TLS assistants, so they were able to teach me what they would be doing if they were in my shoes. It was a great day and I would never have imagined that the following year I'd be lucky enough to be back there, but this time as an operator, again on one of the busy handheld cameras."

The training I received both years was invaluable: learning how to cable bash on a busy show weaving in and out of the tables in a hurry; and then the following year using my camera notes to find tables, groups of people, individuals and walk-ons, as well as offer listening and applause shots.

It's been nearly a year since I joined the TLS camera department as an assistant, and the Children's BAFTAs is just one of many training days I've been lucky enough to be a part of."

Emma Feely

"In the two years since joining TLS I have participated in and taken advantage of a number of training opportunities, including the AMIs, Children's BAFTAs, TLS training days and ITV Upfronts. Some of these are existing productions that TLS has actively become involved with and others are solely down to TLS staff putting their

heads together to come up with something great and inspiring for eager assistants.

There have been opportunities to operate pedestal studio cameras as well as handhelds on a busy awards ceremony, plus various chances to shoot music numbers, some scripted (therefore requiring an understanding of all the camera disciplines) and others unscripted (a chance to offer well-composed shots for the director to choose from). Not only was this an opportunity to put into practice the basics of operating technique but also highlighted the fact that only through experience can technique be polished to the point where you can hope to add that certain finesse.

I've learnt that a lot comes from good preparation – the way you set up your camera for comfortable operation, how you interpret and simplify your notes, to make full use of rehearsal time, how to communicate with your crew, the ability to listen to talkback and to use your initiative. It's safe to say that it is through 'red light experience' that confidence and experience grow and this is what these training days offer, not to mention the on-the-job training and opportunities that arise day-to-day on live shows. You really never know when you come into work if you will be asked to jump on camera, whether it be for a green room shot, the duration of a show or a live music number. For me, it is these opportunities on camera and the training days that reassert why I am here at TLS – to become an experienced operator."

Kris Winser writes: "Along with specific and organised training days (including grid, gas safety and even manual handling) there are many opportunities for assistants to experience 'on-the-job' training on specific shows, often joining the show as an operator for a short period of six weeks, then returning to assisting having been inspired to keep practising in order to make the jump up to being a full-time



Jamie Sullivan, Sound Check training day

operator. These six-week stints can often be seen as more important than one-off training days as they allow the assistant to experience what an operator goes through daily. The more experienced assistants get these opportunities once they have proved themselves on other training days.

Training doesn't stop after the transition from assistant to operator either. As a No 3 cameraman, I took over the role of supervisor on the annual Children's BAFTAs. This was a great hands-on opportunity to experience supervising not just a regular show, but a prestigious awards ceremony. It is recognised by management and Heads of Department that there is constantly more to learn, and the desire to keep pushing yourself to try new things and further your career is very much encouraged. The senior management recognises the importance of this opportunity for junior

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members of the department and gives 100% support to making sure that as many staff assistants as possible are able to operate when required to.

The Children's BAFTAs is also a great opportunity for work experience. We take on students or those trying to get a foot in the industry, and they become our assistants for the day. The strong relationship between TLS and BAFTA, along with the vision and understanding that this kind of training is paramount to the creation of future talent in the UK, enables this to happen.

Many well-known and skilled cameramen and women have started their career at The London Studios. The importance of good training is still very much on the agenda."



Greg Firth at the Children's BAFTAs

Fact File

Find out more about the ITV Insight scheme at: www.itvjobs.com/working-here/itv-insight

Chris Owen started as a camera trainee with LWT at Wembley Studios in 1972 before the company's move to London's South Bank. After spells as a production manager and then location manager, he returned to the camera department, working up to senior cameraman and eventually Head of Department. He now manages the Camera and Sound Departments at The London Studios.

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After 4 years' experience as a jib assistant and tracking vehicle driver, Kris Winser spent 3 years as an assistant at The London Studios, progressing to cameraman. He currently also supervises the Children's BAFTAs training days.

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