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Report lead: Matthew Donaldson

SURVEY REPORT:
A report on increasing work opportunities,
revising the minimum pay rates, working
conditions and standard contracts for Screen
Composers in Aotearoa/ New Zealand
Part of the Turning up the Volume campaign

Contributors:

Matthew Donaldson

Janet Roddick

Marshall Smith

Polly McKinnon

Melissa Conway



Contents

Introduction	3
Background	6
Demographics	
Overview	7
Payments	
Overview	10
Recommendations	20
Contracts	
Overview	33
Recommendations	37
Working Conditions	
Overview	40
Recommendations	49
Executive Summary	53

Introduction

In November 2023, the Screen Music and Sound Guild of New Zealand / Te uepū Kaitito Whakaata conducted an international survey of Screen Composers in English-speaking countries, receiving a total of 29 responses.

The survey results were compiled into [a comprehensive document](#), listing respondent comments, notes and recommendations. This information has been interpreted and refined for the purposes of this report. It is worth noting that some of the comments made by Screen Composers apply more broadly to screen industry workers in general.

The survey questions mostly related to contracts, payments and working conditions for Screen Composers. They also asked for suggestions on creating more positive and equitable working agreements with greater transparency, especially in relation to royalty payments.

The questions were phrased to relate specifically to the pay and working conditions of Screen Composers in the last 12 months.

Generally speaking, the findings from the survey indicated the following: Screen Composers are mostly freelancers / self-employed, and work on a contract-to-contract basis, rather than being employed by studios as full-time, permanent workers.

Consequently, there is a significant disparity in the way work agreements have been entered into compared to other industries, in terms of contracts, pay and working conditions.

Freelancing does not afford Screen Composers the same entitlements and job security that other industries enjoy. When events occur that significantly disrupt their work life balance, freelancers are not well supported or protected; there are no sick days or annual leave days, and their income is unreliable.



Survey data also indicates that many Screen Composers experience burnout or elevated stress levels because productions tend to spend a lot of their budget in the early stages, failing to accurately budget or schedule for the time it takes a Composer to complete a score to a high level of quality.

When Screen Composers work without contracts that ensure standard terms and conditions and minimum pay rates, it is at the production's advantage. Screen Composers have no legal recourse if they:

- Work longer hours than an agreed working day
- Are ill or can't work, and wish to negotiate an extended deadline
- Are asked to spend longer than expected on requested changes to the score, which ends up reducing their profit margins
- Find themselves in an employment dispute with soured working relationships.

Screen Composers working contract-to-contract also often struggle with career longevity; job security is not guaranteed, and the effort needed to find the next job is unpaid, which can result in long stretches without reliable income.

Screen Composers are also paid differently to many other screen audio workers, receiving an 'all in one' fee which is expected to cover musicians, assistants, recording venues and equipment. Multiple changes requested by the production or commissioning organisation above and beyond the brief, extend their work, impacting their profit margin.

Additionally, Screen Composers typically invest additional time refining their work to meet personal and professional standards, aiming to uphold their reputation in the industry and ensure a premium portfolio to reference when pursuing their next job, even if the production budget and schedule is reduced. This 'all-in-one-fee' system may negatively impact Screen Composers getting paid for their actual time.



This report sets out to show why standard collective contracts with minimum rates and conditions for Screen Composers will create a more stable, happy and healthy working environment, resulting in the production of consistently high-quality scores for screen productions.



Background

Survey questions and answers were collected in four blocks:

1. Demographics
2. Rates and Payments
3. Contracts
4. Working Conditions.

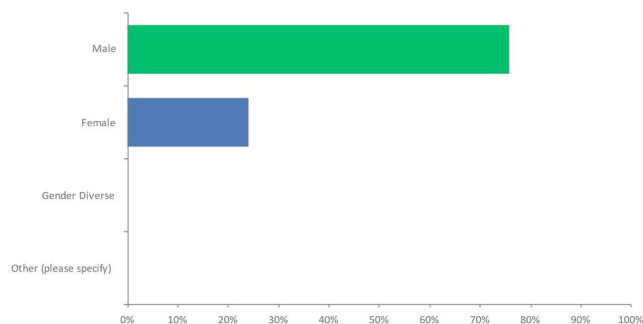
Survey data and respondent comments have been summarised into notes for each area, followed by recommendations.

Demographics - overview

It is notable that the male-to-female ratio among respondents is 75% Male, 25% Female.

Q1: Are you

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0

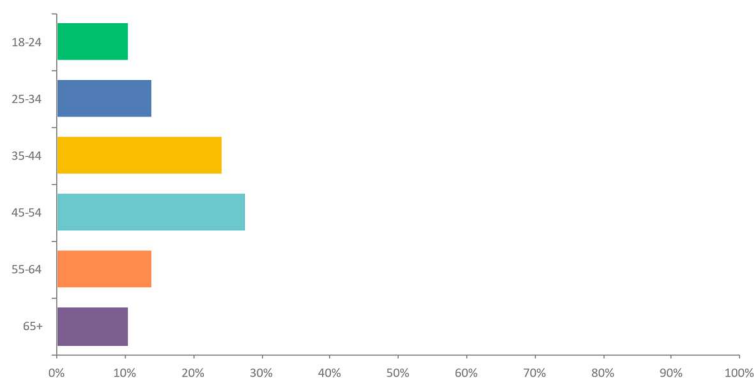


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Respondents varied in age across the 18 – 65+ range, but Screen Composers were most heavily represented in the 35 – 44 and 45 – 54 age brackets.

Q2: Which age bracket are you in?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



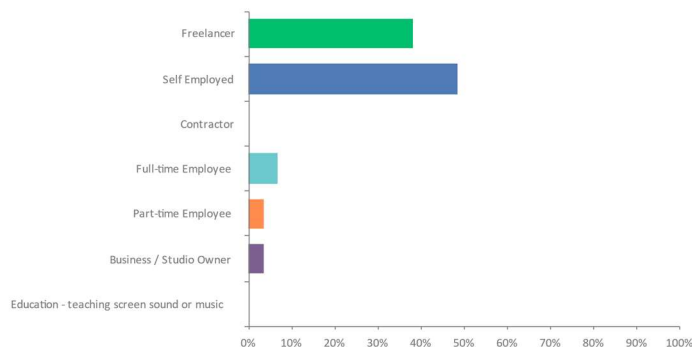
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The majority of respondents identified Screen Composer as their main role, with some noting that they work in additional roles including: sound designer, sound editor/recordist and songwriter.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were freelancers / self-employed (86%)

Q4: What best describes your working situation?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0

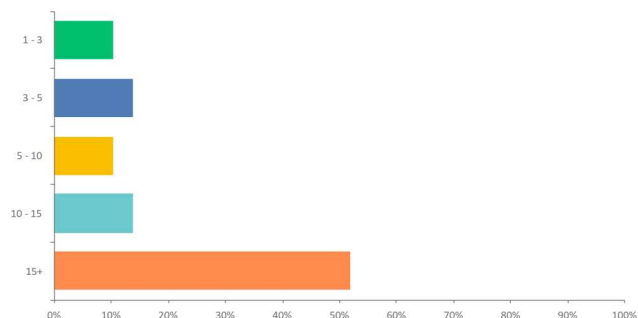


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The majority of respondents had worked in the industry for 15+ years (51%)

Q5: How many years have you worked in the Screen Audio sector?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0

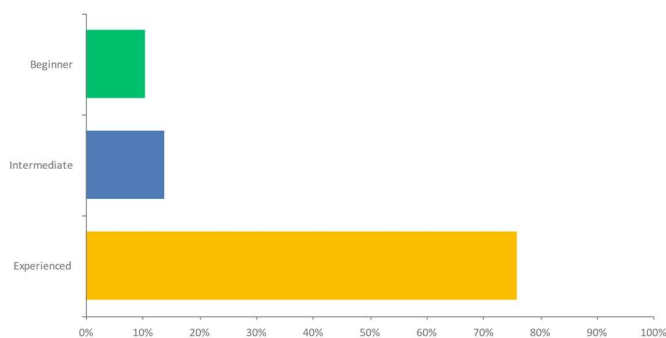


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75% of respondents considered themselves as experienced rather than beginner or intermediate level.

Q6: How would you best describe your experience level?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



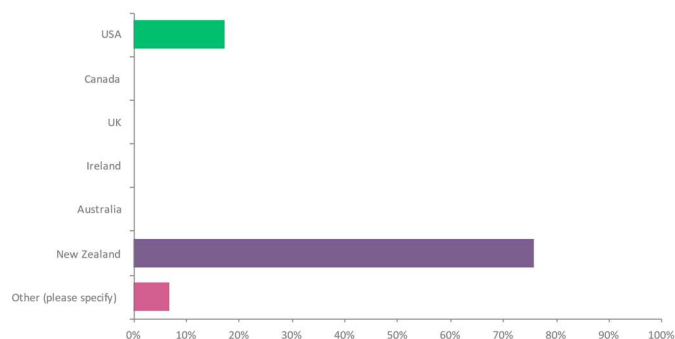
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Most of the respondents (75%) based themselves in New Zealand

Q7: Which country do you base yourself in?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



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Payments - overview

Many Screen Composers note that they are usually paid a set fee including their expenses, rather than an hourly or daily rate. Many respondents supported overhauling the payment structure.

The inclusive approach can be problematic. If a project takes longer than anticipated (through no fault of the Screen Composer) they are required to continue producing work until the commissioning organisation is satisfied, with a resultant reduction in the Composer's profit margin.

One respondent suggested that *unpaid* pitching sessions were also problematic, again putting pressure on Screen Composers to do unpaid work.

Another suggestion was to increase Screen Composers' minimum rates in line with inflation. However, it is difficult to calculate this figure without baseline data measuring typical earnings, adjusted against the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This is largely due to variable costs associated with inclusive fees.

Rates

The survey compared hourly rates in Aotearoa with those paid internationally. These vary, with some countries operating eight-hour days and some ten-hour days.

Some Composers suggested that it would be impossible to accurately gauge an hourly rate due to variable costs in inclusive rates.

All agreed that like most other workers in the screen industry, Screen Composers charge different rates depending on the budget of each production, which vary across different formats.

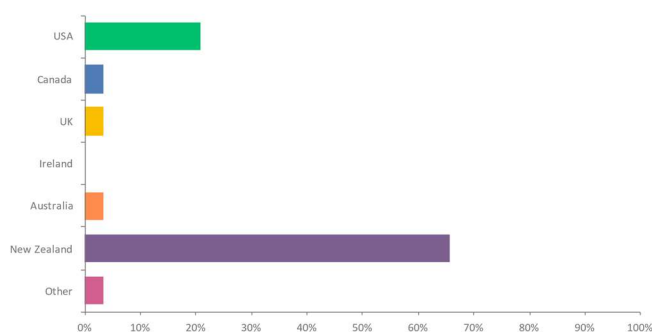
For example, rates and production budgets differ between an online series, commercial jingle, student short film, independent documentary, a local, publicly-funded feature film, and an international commercial studio feature film.

It was noted that there should be different minimum rates for *each* of these formats and budgets, for consistency in the rate Screen Composers charge. The SMSGNZ rates card reflects this and will be updated over time.

Most respondents indicated their top pay rates comes from advertising, TV and feature films. Hourly rates ranged from \$20ph to \$250ph (N.B. some respondents included costs such as venue hire, musician hire etc in their hourly rate).

Q8: Which country do you receive MOST of your income from?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



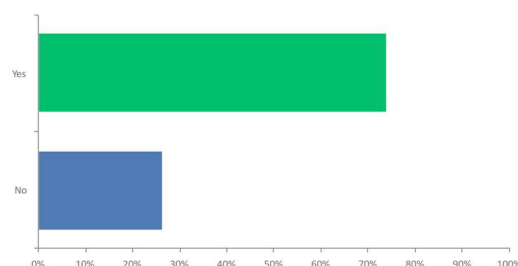
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Working for less than minimum standard rates

Almost 75% of Screen Composers have charged below minimum guild rates in the last 12 months, for a variety of reasons.

Q10: In the last 12 months, have you charged LESS than your guild's MINIMUM recommended rate, and if so, please say why in the comments box (All answers are anonymous and kept completely confidential)

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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Sometimes Screen Composers will accept working for less money if it means acquiring more IMDB screen credits for their portfolio and secure upcoming work with better pay rates. However, the next job may also not pay well, or include poor working conditions. Screen Composers have no legal protections.

Screen Composers (much like other sound workers), also reduce their rates as a goodwill gesture towards arts, student, passion and charity projects. This may lead to relationship building for future projects with full rates; word-of-mouth recommendations are powerful in increasing employment opportunities in the screen industry.

Rates - scarcity of work

The scarcity of work is concerning, recently highlighted by the flow-on impacts in New Zealand from the recent Writers and Actors strikes in the US. Scarcity of work is one factor influencing Screen Composers charging less than their usual minimum rate; some work and pay is better than no work and pay. This particularly affects those new to the industry who often work for significantly lower rates to secure jobs, undervaluing their worth.

One respondent suggested that increased government funding would generate more work. However, if no additional government funding is applied (as currently indicated), commissioning more productions would spread the limited amount of funding available too thinly to pay existing workers at their minimum rates, effectively driving wages down during a cost-of-living crisis.

More money must be allocated to screen funding agencies by Government. Without it, fewer films and TV productions will likely be commissioned, and Screen Composers will continue earning unfair rates of pay.



Regardless of any additional funding, NZFC, NZOA, Te Māngai Pāho and all screen funding agencies should incentivise the use of New Zealand Screen Composers on local and international productions, including gaming and interactive productions. The [5% tax rebate uplift](#) model used by NZFC as well as the PDV rebate, encourage the use of local industry practitioners. It is an appropriate model to replicate across all local funding agencies.

Rates - breaking into the industry

New Screen Composers get a 'foot in the door' and increase their portfolios as they learn their craft work on low-budget films for reduced rates, this allows them to break into the industry and increase their portfolios. Many new Screen Composers accept working for less than minimum rates as an investment in gaining on-screen credits, relationship building, and staying fresh in the memory of Producers. This, however, undercuts rates paid to established Screen Composers, and reinforces to Producers and production accountants that lower paying rates is acceptable.

Rates - cost of living

Many fledgeling and independent filmmakers are increasingly unable to afford to pay even minimum standard rates set by guilds and unions. In an industry needing to retain highly skilled workers, the rising cost of living affects their ability to feed themselves and pay off the cost of their equipment while they continue upskilling. High paying jobs are rare, and low paying jobs (even below the minimum rate may be the only ones available.

Rates - royalties

At least half of respondents attribute royalties to making up between 10% and 50% of their annual income.

Good faith processes for royalty payments are established, administered and distributed through the Australasian Performing Right Association

(APRA) and Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners Society (AMCOS) also known as APRA AMCOS.

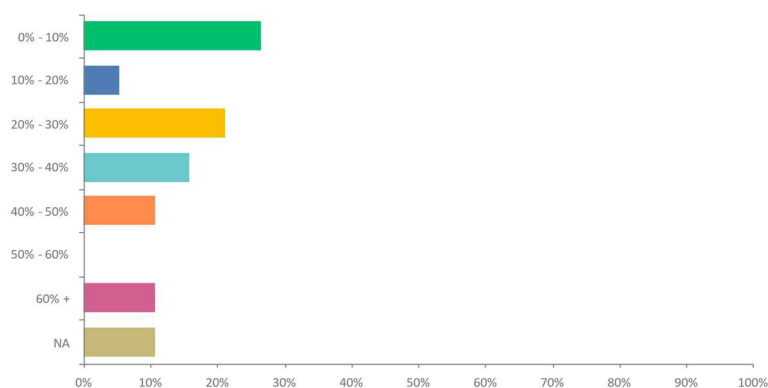
Royalties can play a significant part of a Screen Composer's income, as they continue to be collected and paid over a long period of time.

These can supplement the Screen Composer's income throughout their working life and into retirement.

Producers need to be aware of the importance of filling out and filing cue sheets correctly so that payments can be made efficiently, and intellectual property is appropriately respected.

Q15: What percentage of your annual income comes from royalties?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



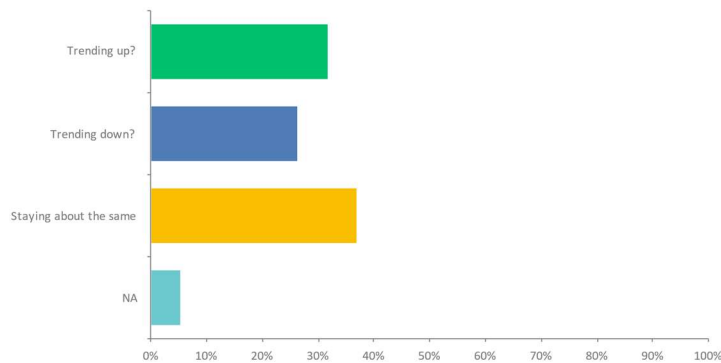
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The more work a Composer does, and the more their work is screened to international audiences, the greater the accumulation of royalties.

Data shows that royalty income has mostly stayed the same over the past 12 months, with 30% of respondents saying their royalty income is trending up.

Q16: In the last 12 months, has your royalty income been:

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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This reinforces the importance of royalty income to many Screen Composers.

Ideally, intellectual property should be retained by the screen Composer so they can continue to receive payments for their intellectual property each time it is used. Buyouts should be the exception; royalties help sustain a Composer's career, with the pipeline of immediate work not always reliable.

Revenue from subscription video streaming companies by way of residuals for actors and writers is a contentious issue, as seen during the recent Writers and Actors Strikes in the US.

An insightful comment in this section of the survey was that the entire audio-visual streaming royalty system needs an overhaul globally, due to recent developments in technology, delivery systems, viewing habits and business models. The commenter mentioned that (for Audio) www.muso.ai is a great service that shows stream counts from Spotify, YouTube, SoundCloud, Shazam, Instagram, TikTok and chart data from Amazon Music, Apple Music, Tidal, Beatport and more.

We now live in an age of Digital Rights Management, music track detection, ISRC codes, and even AI tools that can detect and isolate different instruments and vocals on a track, as well as how long they are played for when streamed (see www.muso.ai / <https://voice.ai/tools/stem-splitter>)

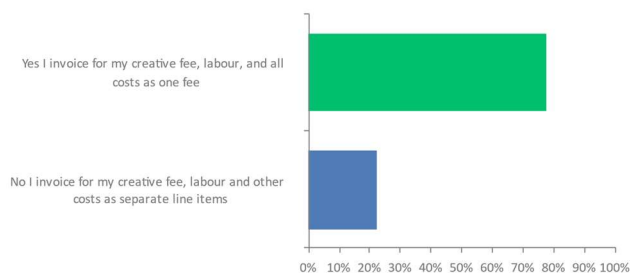
Theoretically, the same type of tools could be applied to identify a Composer's work every time it is streamed, and that information be automatically sent to existing royalty collection / distribution agencies for follow up. Ideally, Composers, musicians, APRA AMCOS, Recorded Music NZ, SVOD streaming companies such as Netflix, Amazon, Disney et al, unions and guilds should be exploring this new tech together, to ensure that royalty payments from SVOD streaming companies are fair and transparent.

Rates – inclusive fees vs quoting itemised costs then invoicing

77% of respondents said that the fee they charged was all inclusive, and covered everything involved in delivering a screen composition to a commissioning organisation.

Q13: Does the fee that you negotiate and invoice for as a Screen Composer, cover all costs relating to final delivery? EG your creative fee, labour, hiring musicians, studio, equipment hire etc?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 11



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For the purposes of gathering data from the survey for comparative analysis, by its nature, the inclusive fee made it difficult to compare minimum standard labour rates with those of Composers from other territories. Another factor was the lack of standardisation in hours counted before overtime is charged. These varied from eight-hour days to ten-hour days.



Comparisons were also difficult because of the varying sizes, budgets, production formats and durations involved in compositions. These, as well as costs included within inclusive rates all differed substantially, making it almost impossible to compare rates between Screen Composers.

This differs significantly from most other types of employment, and needs further research to explain why this is.

Using a brief to scope and getting clarity on the size of the job, and then quoting appropriately before work starts, is useful. Discussions about extra costs if there are delays, or extra special requests from the client can then take place in good faith. These extra costs can be detailed in a final invoice.

Notably, one respondent said that it is often smaller production budgets that prefer inclusive fees, with the Screen Composer absorbing extra labour costs in order to maintain their professional reputation, reducing production costs.

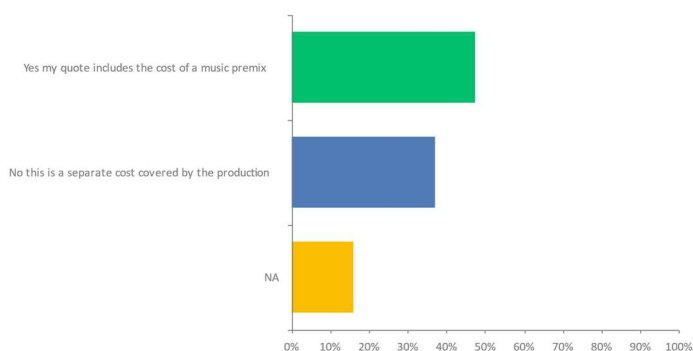
Inclusive fees often result in Composers working more hours than agreed, for the same money, spending their own money to enhance the quality of their work, and therefore the quality of the production.

Rates – variable costs - music premix fees

Screen Composers are required to deliver the completed Music Master in a specified format to the final mix. This could range from a single stereo stem through to multiple stems in stereo, 5.1, 7.1 or Atmos. The Screen Composer may be able to create the finished mix from their own studio set up but may need to hire a mixer and facility.

Q12: Do you usually include the cost of a music premix in your total fee?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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47% of respondents' fee includes the cost of a music premix, while 36% said that it was a separate cost covered by the production. This is a grey area for Screen Composers and Producers in terms of standard charging practices; what constitutes an extra cost, and potentially, what is expected in the deliverables?

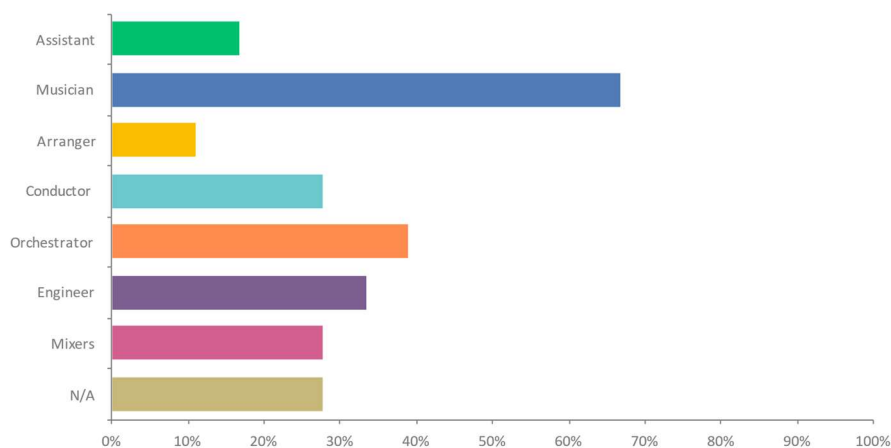
There is an opportunity to introduce standard line-item fees in contracts, quotes and briefs, in an effort to clarify the structure of Screen Composers' fees for Producers, removing doubt about what things cost, what is being covered, and what will be delivered.

Rates – variable costs - hiring musicians and staff

There are also significant variable costs in hiring other contributors such as musicians, orchestrators, engineers, conductors, arrangers and assistants, depending on the size of the budget. It is difficult to compare fees and create baseline minimum standards if hiring costs are not calculated separately.

Q14: Do you employ other people? (If so, please tick the boxes that apply)

Answered: 18 Skipped: 11



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Payments - recommendations

Unpaid pitching – recommendations

Screen Composers going the extra mile to get the job they want can include unpaid pitching. Where pitching is considered a mandatory part of the process for securing a contract, SMSGNZ should have pre-established basic minimum rates for Screen Composers who have been invited to pitch. These should be visible on the SMSGNZ website.

Eight-hour days – recommendations

Although the nature of composing for the screen is creative, often takes place in the Screen Composer's own space, and doesn't necessarily follow the structure of a nine-to-five work day, there is an argument for daily rates based on eight hours of work per day, rather than ten (or more).

Eight hours is the standard length of a working day in almost every other industry before overtime is charged. There is also a movement internationally within the screen industry, to institute eight hours as a standard working day rather than ten.

[This article from Deadline](#) shows that BBC is considering the findings of a study showing that while production costs may increase by a minimal amount, the health and wellbeing of workers would be better protected with an eight-hour standard rate before overtime is charged. Better allowances could be made for parents trying to balance work, childcare and other family obligations.

Screen composer business workshops – recommendations

Given the freelance nature of scoring for the screen, Composers are usually obliged to take on business and administration elements in their work which they may not be skilled in, and which may negatively affect financial management.



One suggestion was for SMSGNZ to run, record and publish business skills workshops for Screen Composers (and other sound workers) in conjunction with SPADA, DEGNZ, APRA / AMCOS, and other related organisations.

These business workshops could cover:

- Standard agreements / contracts / royalty splits
- Cue sheets and APRA - how to get paid your royalties!
- Publishing rights, copyrights and buyouts
- A session with a lawyer to explain the Composer contract template
- Claiming business expenses, paying tax and identifying industry specific accountants
- Generally everything that a Screen Composer should know about being self employed
- Payments and royalties across different territories.

Briefs, quotes, invoices – recommendations

Several respondents commented that the Screen Composer payment system needs an overhaul, especially in light of new technological developments and streaming structures.

If the inclusive fee system is to remain in place, there should be discussion among SMSGNZ Screen Composer members about instituting a new structure for a more formal process (such as the one proposed below) before work on a production begins.



For example, to create:

1. A brief outlining expectations around territory and usage (online, broadcast etc.), the number and durations of music tracks delivered, commercial and promotional usage, intellectual property and royalties, and delivery timeframes
2. A quote, (based on the brief) that itemises the Screen Composer's projected costs such as creative fees, recording venue hire, equipment hire, musician hire, music premixes, and most importantly the Screen Composer's rate for their time, reflected as a daily or weekly rate based on an eight-hour day
3. A payment schedule, where the timings of payments are based on agreed dates and milestones, and noting the extra costs that may be charged if an agreed number of revisions are exceeded
4. An invoice that reflects the quote, detailing any extra costs over and above the initial quote previously agreed with the Producer / commissioning organisation so there are no surprises.

SMSGNZ can develop and create standard template forms for these briefs, quotes, payment schedules, and invoices, using a check box / line-item system.

Composer contracts should make clear the distinction between the labour charges, and separate costs being charged for such as music premixes, recording venue hire, musician hire, equipment hire, assistant hire etc. These costs should be negotiated separately as they vary between projects.

Negotiations relating to adding performers, engineers, premixing etc should be done pre-contract and confirmed in a quote. If the quote is accepted then an agreement is recorded as a memo, and the contract signed. Ideally this is completed before the Composer begins any significant work.



The Composer's labour should be calculated separately, so that if extra requests or delays occur at the end of the production, or the Composer's time extends beyond the brief for any reason, extensions can be reasonably negotiated at an early stage, (with extra fees if appropriate) so that the Composer can add this time to their invoice, and be fully compensated.

Any discounts given by the Screen Composer can then be transparent, and any extra time required by the Producer / commissioning organisation can be reasonably compensated for, based on transparent labour costs.

These measures would mean Producers understand minimum rate levels that they should expect to pay on full-budget productions.

Music premix fees – recommendations

Whether a premix is available / necessary should be addressed and agreed at the briefing stage, and quoted as a cost additional to the Composer's fee (or not) as appropriate, and set out in the agreement.

Music premix costs should be treated as a variable cost line item in standard briefs, quotes and invoices, much like equipment hire, venue hire and musician hire - depending on each unique situation.

Rates - recommendations

Rates (labour only) should be calculated with a daily rate of eight hours (not ten), where overtime is calculated after that. This change should be managed in conversation with NZOA, NZFC, SPADA, regional film offices and other guilds, giving Producers and studios sufficient time to adjust the way they calculate their budgets, and for other guilds to align with the eight-hour day structure, in line with other industries.

Push back from various organisations, including studios / international Producers / commissioning organisations should be anticipated by SMSGNZ, and appropriate responses prepared in advance and supported by other NZ Screen Production guilds.



This will likely have far-reaching implications, and may be quite disruptive. It merits more in-depth conversation with SMSGNZ members on the pros and cons, as well as potentially offering sweeteners to help the smooth passage of this change.

Forty-hour weeks should become standard, where Composers keep track of their hours (especially if they work overtime), and have a memorandum of understanding stating that it is the Screen Composer's responsibility to let the production know if the workload / number of hours is starting to exceed the original agreement.

Negotiations (supported by SMSGNZ if necessary) can begin if the Screen Composer feels that they need to be paid overtime due to changes or delays at the Producer's / commissioning organisation's end. For this to occur, the Screen Composer will show that the number of hours originally agreed to under existing deadlines within a forty-hour week will be exceeded because of a request for additional changes to the brief from the Producer / commissioning organisation.

Screen Composers should also keep up good communication with the production / commissioning organisation about the number of hours spent vs quality of work while the work is in progress, under a 'no surprises', good faith agreement.

SMSGNZ could also encourage their Composer members to share strategies about preventing job creep by creating a model. For example, having a maximum of two briefs and three rounds of changes under reasonable signoff before more money can be charged, and applying those boundaries as contractual protection.

Minimum Screen Composer rates should be on par with Australian counterparts.



However, determining minimum standard daily or weekly rates for Composers (excluding expenses such as equipment, venue, and musician hire) remains contentious. This is because Screen Composers are typically paid inclusive fees, making comparisons in standard terms difficult.

Discussing standard minimum rates is further hindered (and requires more discussion among SMSGNZ members) by an idea, floated among other guilds, that there should be different minimum standard daily / weekly rates for different production budgets and formats.

For example, composing a jingle for a TV commercial would command a different daily rate than composing for an online web series or a feature film, TV drama, or gaming/interactive productions.

Internally, there's a need for more discourse on the practicalities of implementing standard minimum rates for labour only for New Zealand Screen Composers.

Koha rates should apply to student projects / self-funded projects / passion projects / arts projects / charity projects – and with clarity and transparency on labour costs vs music expenses. This means that, if necessary, discounts can be made appropriately and transparently, so that Screen Composers are not underpaid for future well-funded projects, with Producers believing that koha rates are standard rates.

SMSGNZ Screen Composer members should discuss what appropriate minimum standard labour rates should apply to different production budget / format categories. The agreed rates should be formalised, and listed on the SMSGNZ 'minimum rates' card.

SMSGNZ should discuss with NZ funding organisations such as NZFC and NZOA, the existing frictions between 1. Funding a greater number of projects where workers are paid less, versus 2. Funding fewer projects where workers are paid more, and how to strike a reasonable balance between the two. There should also be conversations about what would be the absolute minimum total budget for a publicly-funded production.



As an example, no feature film should go ahead on a budget of less than \$1m, where guild workers are expected to work for below-minimum rates.

Scarcity of work - attraction and rebate recommendations

Strategy Proposals – Enhancing International Opportunities

- SMSGNZ should use the next Regional Film Offices of New Zealand (RFONZ) conference as an opportunity to propose that RFONZ, SMSGNZ and the NZFC collaborate more closely when it comes to *post-production attraction*. A strategy and action plan should be developed to promote the professional and economic benefits of using NZ Screen Composers, orchestras and music production / sound editing facilities through the various rebate schemes to international companies.
- SMSGNZ should create an MOU with NZFC and RFONZ to engage and consult on attraction strategy, policy and marketing, along with the creation of promotional and marketing documents.
All three organisations should discuss how they can work in a more coordinated way to improve opportunities for screen music and sound workers in New Zealand.
- SMSGNZ should work with NZFC to amend section B7 of Appendix 3 of their [NZSPR International Criteria document](#), changing the wording in the title to ‘Sound Post-Production *and Music* in New Zealand’, clarifying and highlighting that music production and scoring is considered part of ‘post-production sound’ in relation to the 5% uplift rebate.
- Alternatively (and preferably), SMSGNZ could work with NZFC on updating the criteria points system for sound post-production, so that screen music composing is distinct AND ADDITIONAL to sound post-production, further incentivising international productions to use local Screen Composers.



- SMSGNZ should engage with NZFC / NZOA to seek clarification on whether VR, AR and XR productions would qualify for NZFC's PDV rebate, or instead through NZOA's local gaming rebate scheme, and if local post-production and scoring done on these would earn criteria points for local rebates.
If neither NZFC or NZOA offer this kind of PDV rebate for the purposes of international interactive attraction, discussions should begin about how to institute this for VR, AR and XR productions.
- NZFC and SMSGNZ should work together on making PDV incentives more internationally attractive. This could include discussing the pros and cons of removing the requirement of forming a Special Production Vehicle (SPV) in order to access the PDV rebate.
- NZFC, RFONZ and SMSGNZ can work together to look at creating bespoke marketing material promoting women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) - who work in the local sound post-production and composing communities to international Producers, line Producers, directors and studios, including gaming and interactive companies. There are often international incentives relating to inclusion and diversity, which may enhance work opportunities for Composers here.
- NZFC, RFONZ, and NZOA should collaborate with the local post-production community (including SMSGNZ) to create a post-production attraction document or brochure, devoting a section to sound and music post-production. This could link to the SMSGNZ site and directory, and highlight the calibre of NZ Screen Composers, orchestras, sound post-production workers, and post-production facilities, including the [National Music Centre](#) sound stage when it is ready for use.



- The sound and music section should include an **incentives sub-section** relating to rebates, highlighting:
 - The 20% NZSPR rebate
 - That international productions using New Zealand Screen Composers can earn criteria points towards receiving the additional NZSPR 5% uplift rebate, for live action productions shot in New Zealand
 - There is a separate NZSPR post-production rebate for work that is PDV only, which qualifies for a 20% rebate of QNZPE.
 - There is a 20% expenditure rebate available through NZOA's Gaming Sector Development Rebate (GDSR), which eligible international gaming and interactive productions can receive for similar finishing work.
- The post-production attraction document should be distributed by NZFC, RFONZ and SMSGNZ, not only to targeted international studios, screen production companies, directors, Producers and line Producers who may be interested in filming live action in New Zealand, but also to those who may be interested in doing *PDV only work* in New Zealand.
- SMSGNZ, NZOA and NZGDA can also work together to distribute this post-production attraction document, to *international gaming companies*, and also to VR, AR and XR production companies, once that rebate eligibility issue is clarified.
- SMSGNZ should work with NZFC and NZOA with regards to agreeing on and updating wording on their relevant rebate documents once the issues above have been resolved, clarifying:
 - Mechanisms for rebates work for international companies seeking PDV or finishing rebates
 - How using New Zealand Screen Composers, post-production sound workers and facilities enhances eligibility for these rebates
 - How these rebates will be administered.



- SMSGNZ could encourage NZFC and RFONZ to highlight to international studios, screen production companies, line Producers and directors, the benefits of not only shooting in New Zealand, but of also staying for post-production via the New Zealand Screen Production Rebate (NZSPR), which would in turn increase work opportunities for Screen Composers.
- SMSGNZ should also establish closer relations with Australian screen music and sound guilds, and associated organisations. This would allow for better information sharing, opportunity sharing and relationship building, which could in turn generate more work opportunities for local screen music and sound workers.
This is especially true, if through their more competitive production expenditure rebate scheme Australia ends up attracting more work than they can handle, and they need to outsource sound post-production and scoring work to New Zealand workers and facilities.

Strategy Proposals – Enhancing Local Opportunities

- SMSGNZ should request that NZFC draw the attention of local NZSPR applicants specifically to the sound and music post-production element of the criteria document (Section B3), highlighting that applicants can gain 1 criteria point on the Significant New Zealand Content test, if they use at least 50% New Zealand Music Recording, Voice Recording and Audio Post-Production. By accumulating 20 criteria points out of a possible 32 on this test, local Producers can more readily access a 40% production expenditure rebate up to \$15million Qualifying New Zealand Production Expenditure (QNZPE).
- SMSGNZ should recommend to the NZFC that using New Zealand Screen Composers should be added as a separate criteria point, so that it is distinct from and additional to sound post-production, further elevating the incentive for local productions to use local Composers, orchestras and music recording facilities.



- SMSGNZ should ask NZOA and TMP to highlight to their applicants the benefits of using local Screen Composers on their productions when they are applying for funding.
- SMSGNZ should work with NZGDA (New Zealand Game Developers Association), as well as NZOA on how to best inform local game developers applying to the GDSR, of the incentivised benefits of using local Screen Composers, musicians, and post-production facilities. This would include advising applicants of the rebates available.

Although the sector has been given a clear indication by the new Government that no more money will be made available to screen funding agencies for the foreseeable future, a case can be built over the next few years advocating for additional investment into local productions. Using evidence-based data, it will illustrate return on investment and other benefits that stimulating local production provides to the wider economy, including increased employment for screen sound and music workers.

Diversifying income by teaching – recommendations

SMSGNZ should also continue working with and developing relationships with the tertiary institutions that teach post-production sound and music for the screen in New Zealand.

In ‘quiet times’ Screen Composer members can be employed by these institutions to teach short-course modules relating to composing for the screen, as an alternative source of income.

Cost of living - reducing costs – recommendations

SMSGNZ could also partner with organisations that rent, hire or sell sound recording and audio equipment and software to give discounts on these things to members. (Another good reason for Screen Composers to join the guild.) SMSGNZ members could make a list of potential partners and make recommendations for such partnerships.



Royalties – recommendations

SMSGNZ can continue to work with AMCOS APRA to ensure royalty payments are fair, that the payment process is clearly explained to their members, that the process is working effectively (including across different territories), and that all of this information is available on the SMSGNZ website.

There could also be a link on the SMSGNZ website to a ‘How To’ guide for Producers, ensuring it is easy for them to follow the correct process for filling out APRA cue sheets, so that Composers are fairly paid.

A clause should be put into SMSGNZ standard Composer contracts stating that the Producer / commissioning organisation must follow all the necessary administrative steps correctly, to ensure that the Screen Composer is paid any royalties they are entitled to.

There should also be links on the SMSGNZ web page relating to royalties, that click through to the [APRA Cue Sheets](#) information page, [their templates](#), and their [submission link](#).

Royalties - recommendations future tech for automation of payments

In an age where DRM (Digital Rights Management) software can track the usage of music, and where payments can be automatically triggered, it should be standard practice for Composers to hold Intellectual Property (IP), and for royalty payment organisations like APRA AMCOS to be automatically alerted and payments made to the Screen Composer, once their screen work starts playing on any of the major subscription video streaming services such as Netflix, Disney+, Amazon etc.

AI tools such as www.muso.ai / <https://voice.ai/tools/stem-splitter> can detect and isolate different instruments and vocals on a track and how long they are played when streamed.



Similar tools could be used to automatically identify and arrange payments when a Screen Composer's work is used on any of these platforms.

SMSGNZ could encourage APRA AMCOS to develop similar tools in order to streamline costs and collect more royalties for their members.

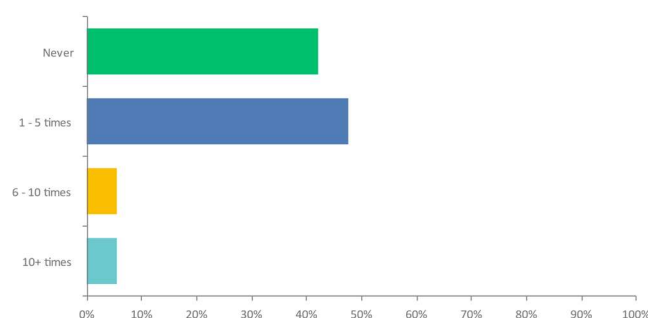
Contracts - overview

Handshake agreements, verbal agreements, 'broad terms' email agreements, late delivery of contracts and / or non-delivery of contracts are all common situations, all of which work in the Producer / commissioning organisation's favour. There is currently no incentive for productions or commissioning organisations to give Composers / screen sound workers the legal protection they deserve in this regard.

58% of survey respondents said that they had worked without a formal contract at some point in the last 12 months.

Q17: How often have you worked without a formal written contract in the last 12 months? And if you have, please describe why in the comments box.

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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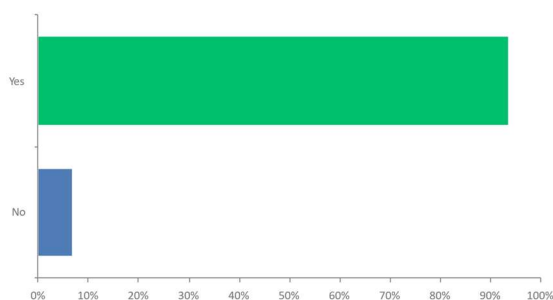
Survey data showed that Screen Composers tend to accept the contract that the Producer / commission organisation offers them without much negotiation, in an effort to show that they (the Screen Composer) are easy to work with, and to better position them for future work. This is fine, but the contracts need to be delivered by the Producers in a timely way.

When asked in the survey, overwhelmingly Screen Composers said they appreciate having a standard contract to download from the guild and use themselves – even if it is just for reference. One respondent said that the standard template contract should not be too complex or use too much legalese. Simple, straight forward and clear is best, so the worker can clearly understand what terms they are agreeing to.

The SMSGNZ already has such a standard template contract for Composers in place, but this (in addition to a standard template license agreement) could be updated regularly and promoted to Composer members to encourage its use.

Q18: If you regularly work without formal written contracts, would you be more likely to use one if there was a sample template contract available to download from your guild or association's website?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 14



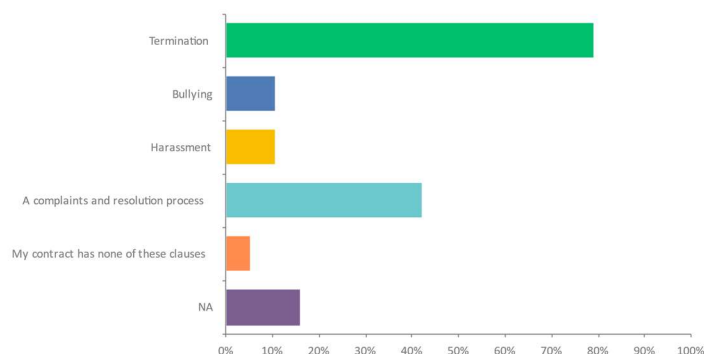
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It was noted that agreements drawn up by the Producer / commissioning organisation always favour the Producer. Using contracts and agreements drawn up by the SMSGNZ acknowledging minimum rates and working conditions for Screen Composers, and agreed to by SPADA, would lead to a more desirable outcome for Screen Composers.

Respondents also noted that more often than not, the contracts supplied to them by Producers / commissioning organisations, were light on bullying and / or harassment clauses, and some contracts had none of these issues mentioned at all.

Q19: Does your current or most recent contract have clauses relating to the following: (Please tick all those that apply)

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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Signing to a publisher

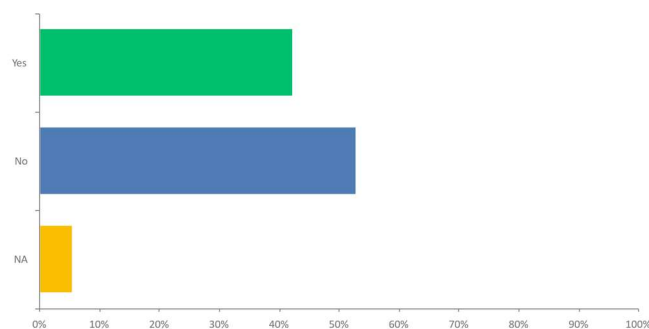
A significant number (42%) of Screen Composers who responded to the survey said that they were signed to a publisher for screen composition work.

Agreements and contracts between publishers and Screen Composers have different terms and conditions as compared to the standard SMSGNZ contract templates.

One of the advantages of choosing a publishing agreement over a template contract, is that most of the admin and legal work is done by the publisher, allowing the Screen Composer more time to focus on composing, and their creative relationship with the filmmaker.

Q20: Are you signed to a publisher for your screen composition work?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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Publishers do take a cut of the royalties for this work, but pay Screen Composers an advance which is then paid back to the publisher over time. This can help the Composer's cashflow.

Giving publishers a percentage incentivises them to work harder to collect royalties from around the world which ultimately benefits the Composer too.

Having a publisher also helps when it comes to negotiating with international productions where legal fees might be quite high.



Suggestions from composers about how contracts could be improved

Many respondents indicated that standard contracts (and simplified Deal Memos for short films) which are available to download from the guild website, reflecting minimum rates and working conditions, are especially useful for Screen Composers who are not signed to publishers.

SMSGNZ should continue to encourage their unsigned members to use these existing template contracts, and draw attention to any updates or revisions.

Noting that Composers who are signed to a publisher should not be using these template agreements, but rather use the contracts and agreements that they have in place with their publisher.



Contracts - recommendations

While SMSGNZ already has a standard template contract for Composers in place, this (in addition to a standard template license agreement) could be updated regularly and promoted to Composer members to encourage its use. Noting however, that if the Composer is signed to a publisher, the publisher will have their own agreement and they will negotiate on the Composer's behalf. This agreement is usually between three parties; the Composer, the publisher and the Producer.

Any updates to the terms, conditions and clauses of the standard contracts (agreed upon by SMSGNZ Composer members) should be discussed with the wider industry sector for feedback, and finalised before the SMSGNZ Composer members are informed of the changes and encouraged to use the updated version.

These updated contracts should have clauses relating to:

1. The Screen Composer's rates are not inclusive of music expenses, and that total fees will be detailed and calculated in an accompanying quote.
2. Intellectual Property Rights - including what kind of rights are granted by the Composer to the Producer with regards to the recording and the composition.
3. The maximum number of revisions a Composer will be asked to undertake before additional fees are charged.
4. Health and safety in relation to working conditions – particularly outlining good faith standard operating procedures if health and safety concerns are raised by Screen Composers.
5. Personal circumstances allowances for negotiation (agreed to by both parties) relating to disability, medical issues, child care and aged care, which may involve flexibility around communication and negotiated deadline extensions.



6. Termination, bullying, harassment, complaints and resolution processes.
7. Additional payments and fees if there are delays or changes at the production's end which require extra work from and / or incur extra costs for the Screen Composer.
8. Production credits across multiple platforms (on screen and IMDB for instance).
9. Publishing and soundtrack royalties, percentages and how these are calculated, collected and distributed.

Updating the SMSGNZ standard template contract for Composer members, drawing their attention to revisions and encouraging them to use these updated contracts would put them in a better negotiating position, rather than waiting for formal contracts from Producers / commissioning organisations.

Screen Composer contracts should include a section acknowledging that the expected workload should not be expected to be more than 40 hours per week, and that if it is overtime provisions should be discussed with the commissioning organisation.

Health and safety clauses should acknowledge that good communication and a medical certificate should be provided, ahead of allowances for paid sick days including Covid leave.

As mentioned in the payments section, SMSGNZ should also develop and create standard downloadable template forms for briefs, quotes and invoices, using a checkbox / line item system, to be used in conjunction with contracts.



Contracts should also acknowledge a standard process involving:

1. An initial scoping meeting.
2. Development or provision of a brief.
3. Providing a quote (where the Screen Composer shows line items separating music expenses such as venue hire, musician hire, equipment hire, music premises etc differentiated from estimated labour costs).
4. Communication if delays or changes require the quote to be reassessed.
5. Delivery of an invoice.

Before any changes to the standard contracts are finalised, SMSGNZ should hold an information evening with SPADA and local screen guilds, seeking feedback on outlined changes and new minimum standards.

Following feedback, SMSGNZ should work with SPADA / The Bluebook to get their endorsements regarding the standard minimum rates and working conditions, to show that these contracts have been negotiated and agreed to in good faith.

The changes and new standards will then be posted as a featured item on the SMSGNZ website, on the same page where the updated standard template contracts are available for download.

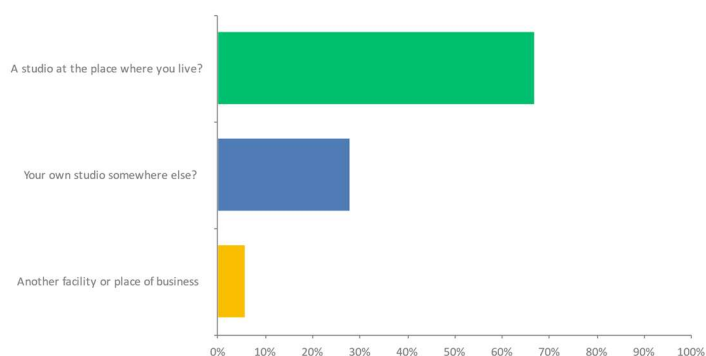
Working conditions - overview

Place of work

66% of Screen Composers worked out of a studio at their home, with 27% working at their own studio located elsewhere, and 5% working from another facility or place of business.

Q22: Where have you worked from most often in the last 12 months?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 11



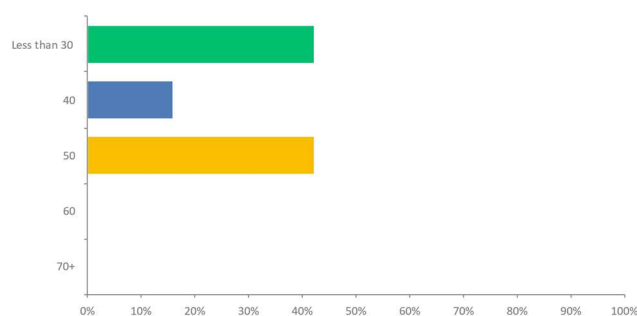
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Hours and overtime

The number of hours that Screen Composers work on a project can fluctuate dramatically given the variable nature of available work that includes short films, advertising jingles and other short form work. At other times they may have ongoing work on TV dramas or feature films.

Q23: How many hours per week would you typically work on a screen music project?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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However, because Screen Composers are currently paid inclusive fees, no overtime is paid if a project lengthens in time or requires last minute changes requiring Screen Composers' input under tight deadlines. There is no way to easily calculate if they are putting in more hours than they are getting paid for.

Personal circumstances considerations

In comparison to screen sound production workers, Screen Composers who work from their own home or studio typically have more flexibility to deal with personal circumstances than those who work on set.

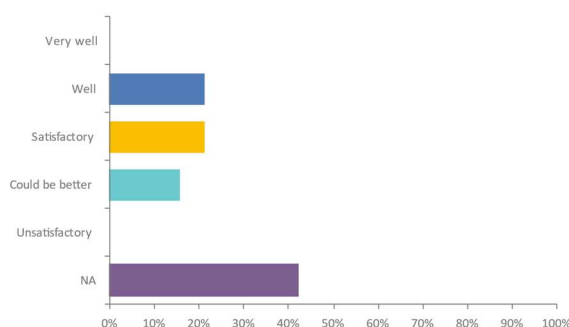
Screen Composers need to be in regular, good faith communication with commissioning organisations and Producers, regarding situations where communication and / or productivity might be more difficult at certain times of the day, week, month or year because of personal circumstances.

While the majority of respondents didn't have personal circumstances requiring flexibility such as disability, medical issues, childcare, and aged care, 10% did.

42% of respondents were mostly satisfied regarding their commissioning organisation's flexibility relating to their personal circumstances.

Q25: How flexible would you say that your current commissioning organization has been in the last 12 months, regarding your personal needs (as mentioned above)?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10



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15% of the 10% who had circumstances requiring flexibility around personal circumstances thought that their commissioning organisation's behaviour was sub-standard in these situations.

Early communication around personal circumstances in the briefing stage and noted in standard contracts may be the answer to better working relationships in these scenarios.

Health and safety – physical working environments

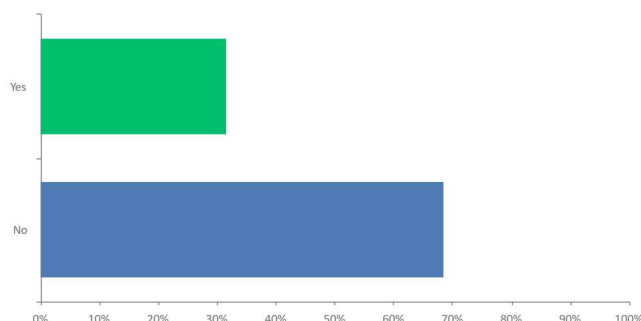
Since most Screen Composers work from home, they already manage their own physical health and safety environment. However, under best practice, SMSGNZ could post examples of ideal ergonomic setups on their website and draw up a health and safety checklist for Screen Composers who work from home.

Health and safety – long hours, tight deadlines causing stress

31% of respondents reported suffering ill health at work because of prolonged hours and / or high stress, and 35% of respondents thought that their commissioning organisations contributed to their stress levels in an unreasonable way.

Q27: Have you suffered ill health at work because of prolonged hours / high stress? (In the last 12 months)

Answered: 19 Skipped: 10

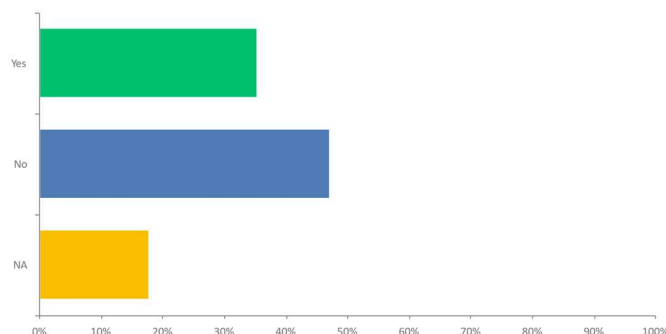


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Q31: Do you think the organizations that commission your work, contribute to your stress levels in an unreasonable way?

Answered: 17 Skipped: 12



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Several respondents reported that much of the stress comes from having timeframes that are too tight for delivery, and not enough money in the budget.

These are all factors at the production end, which could and should be mitigated with better Producer education and production budgeting workshops held in conjunction with NZFC and SPADA.

Screen composing is not a job share or a 'hire a fill in' scenario, it is a creative process and the Screen Composer is solely responsible for the creative direction and delivery; tight deadlines cannot be solved by hiring more people to speed up the process.

Tight turnaround times for commercials, often with unclear briefs, causes the most stress for Screen Composers due to the amount of money at stake and associated tight deadlines.

Lack of communication and late changes during production can increase time pressures for the Screen Composer with no extra pay, in turn creating more stress.

The point was well made by one survey respondent, who reported that, especially at the end of the post-production process, there is often less time and money to complete jobs because of schedule and budget overruns.

This means that Screen Composers are often asked to do ‘more for less’ to make the production’s ends meet, by sacrificing their own time to ensure high-quality completion.

This can create a power imbalance and put pressure on Screen Composers, (especially when they are typically freelancers), where saying ‘no’ or pushing back can earn them the label of ‘difficult to work with’, potentially affecting future employability.

Standard baseline expectations laid out by the guild about timelines, payments and how to handle common situations like unreasonable deadlines, or inadequate budgets to cover Screen Composers’ hours may mitigate some of those stressful situations.

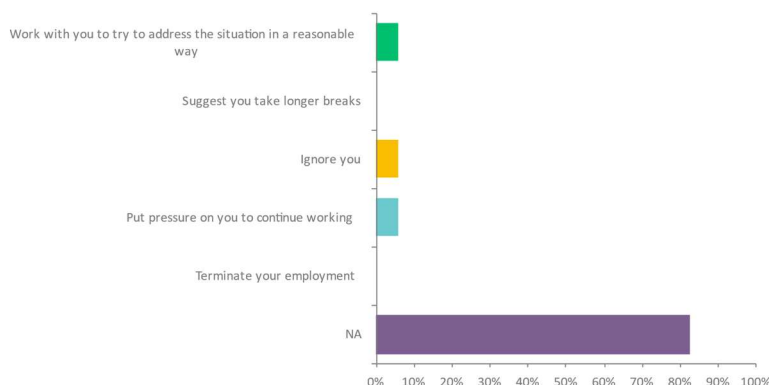
One respondent noted that music seems to be an afterthought for Producers in the budgeting and post-production process.

Handling health and safety / working conditions complaints

Even though there were only a small proportion of respondents who said that their commissioning organisations ignored them or put pressure on them to continue working when they raised concerns about the effects of stressful working conditions on their health, this behaviour is still of concern.

Q32: If you've complained to your commissioning organization about working conditions affecting your health in the last 12 months, did they:

Answered: 17 Skipped: 12



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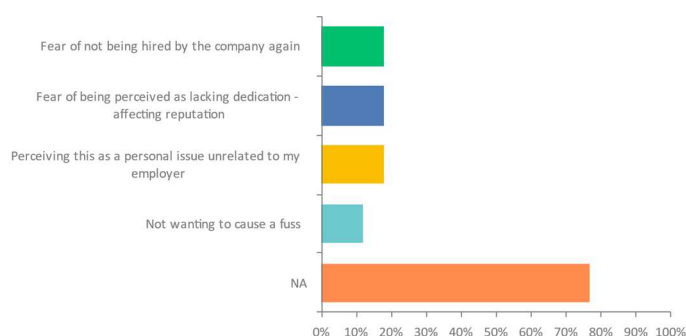
6% said that their commissioning organisation tried to work with them constructively;
 6% said that their concerns were ignored;
 6% said that they were pressured to continue working despite flagging an issue.

Screen Composers who identified eyestrain, hearing loss, physical pain or mental health issues as a result of what they perceived were unreasonable demands, but decided against making a complaint, gave the following reasons:

18% said they were worried they wouldn't be hired by the company again;
 18% said that they feared being perceived as lacking dedication, affecting professional reputation;
 18% said they perceived this as a personal rather than a professional problem;
 12% said they didn't want to cause a fuss.

Q33: If you have suffered eyestrain, hearing loss, physical pain or mental health issues due to unreasonable demands, but you've decided against complaining, what prevented you from doing so?

Answered: 17 Skipped: 12



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These results show that Screen Composers experience anxiety related to losing future work if they consider making legitimate complaints about health, safety and working conditions.

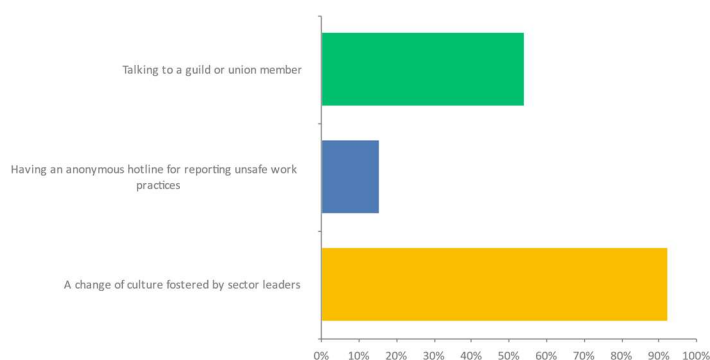
Notably, other Screen Composers felt like they could handle their own business. Their perception is that Producers, commissioning organisations and sector leaders should be responsible for creating a culture change that encourages mutual respect among workers, clients and executives when it comes to discussions about unreasonable work pressures.

However, contracts outlining minimum standards, working conditions and pay rates can give *legal* strength these while fostering a good working culture.

Other respondents suggested the strength in numbers from having an advocacy organisation like a guild to represent them in situations of conflict would be beneficial. This is evidenced by 53% saying they would appreciate having better avenues and clear processes relating to how to raise these issues such as ‘talking to a guild or union member’.

Q34: What would encourage you to speak up about unreasonable work pressure?

Answered: 13 Skipped: 16



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These results confirm the necessity of guilds and unions to establish basic standards relating to minimum pay and fair working conditions, and negotiate with Producers and commissioning organisations to agree to these in standard legal contracts.

Stress caused by unpredictable royalties income

Some Composers are confused about how royalties are collected and distributed. Having no way to predict the timing or amount of future royalties can cause uncertainty and stress.

It can also create a lack of clarity on whether it is appropriate for Screen Composers to follow up with Producers, commissioning organisations or collection agencies such as APRA to find out whether their musical works have been properly registered and relevant Music Cue Sheets logged in the correct way.

There is an associated fear that asking questions or making demands of Producers may be perceived as nagging or criticising which may in turn affect future work prospects.

Stress caused by scarcity of work

Stress caused by scarcity of work was also a common theme in the survey comments.

When the work dries up, people start making exceptions to minimum rates, undercutting each other just to survive.

Responsibility for maintaining the international production attraction pipeline mostly falls to NZFC and RFONZ (the Regional Film Offices of New Zealand). This pipeline is crucial for contributing to an environment where attracting international productions to film in New Zealand creates well-paying jobs with a diversity of work, with the flow-on benefit of stimulating of local productions.



However, when there is a scarcity of international work, the scope of well-paying job opportunities narrows, and there is higher competition for lower paying roles, increasing stress levels.

The unpredictable nature of guaranteed work makes it hard to build financial security, and have faith in career longevity.

Collective contracts and good guild advice can mitigate this, and make screen composing a more viable, attractive and realistic long-term career option.

Working conditions - recommendations

Ultimately, the survey results indicate that SMSGNZ should move forward with designing and delivering a 'best practice' guide for how Producers and commissioning organisations engage with, deal with, and pay Screen Composers, to avoid or mitigate high pressure situations, especially with regards to unrealistic deadlines and late changes.

Collective contracts

Despite the repeal of the Fair Pay Agreement Act in December 2023, and the Government making clear there will be no more money available for funding the sector, SMSGNZ should continue to work in good faith with other guilds (supported by NZFC and NZOA) and consider aligning with CTU, Actors Equity, the Writers Guild and Wecreate, in presenting a united campaign to the Government, that stresses the importance of the screen industry is to the New Zealand economy. New Zealand could guarantee high-quality crews and screen services to international film productions visiting the country, by introducing intellectual property protections and minimum standards for pay and working conditions for screen music and sound workers through collective contract agreements.

Work on this should in collaboration with SPADA, who are already engaged with central Government on this issue. A collective, strategic approach may yield better results than a unilateral approach.

Lobbying NZ funding agencies for bigger budgets on fewer productions – recommendations

SMSGNZ should lobby NZFC and NZOA with data-based reasoning and recommendations, for bigger budgets and fewer productions to ensure NZ Composers and other screen Audio workers are adequately paid on publicly-funded productions.



Part of this recommendation should include a baseline minimum confirmed budget before productions can be greenlit, for example \$1m minimum for a feature film. This would increase the quality of local productions, making NZ a more attractive proposition.

In a climate of a new Government where spending on arts is likely to be reduced and employment rules changed, an increase in funding for screen agencies to spend on such things is unlikely.

Royalties payments – recommendations

SMSGNZ should set up a royalties web page clearly describing existing workflows and processes for Screen Composers to receive royalties locally and internationally. This would also link to APRA AMCOS's specific royalty payments pages and documents.

Health and safety physical environment – recommendations

SMSGNZ should develop a health and safety section for their website. On this page, SMSGNZ could specify maximum safe audio levels and best practice for Screen Composers in accordance with WorkSafe legal standards, so that SMSGNZ Screen Composers can ensure their own setup and work practices comply.

The website should describe what an ideal studio / working from home set up is ergonomically. This could include electric standing desks, sound proofing, equipment settings etc, and a basic health and safety checklist for Screen Composers who work from home or from their own studio.

SMSGNZ could then partner with retailers of various ergonomic products and sound recording / editing equipment, increasing SMSGNZ revenue from these retailers, in return for advertising their products direct to members.



As part of the partnership agreement, SMSGNZ could provide discounts to members in the form of an SMSGNZ code, when they buy ergonomic products or sound equipment from the partnered retailers.

These discounts would be another incentive for Screen Composers to join the guild.

Health and safety – stress levels causing illness or pain / personal circumstances – recommendations

There should be a clause added to the standard template contract, about standard operating procedures if health concerns are raised by Composers.

SMSGNZ can also partner with massage, chiropractic, physio and physical training providers (increasing guild revenue for advertising these services to members) where SMSGNZ offers members discounts when using these partnered services. (Another incentive for potential members to join the guild).

SMSGNZ could also include these offers on the health and safety section of their website; recommendations for duration and frequency of breaks, micropauses, time spent outside, stretches, physical and breathing exercises and other ways to deal with stress such as mindfulness and meditation.

Health and safety handling complaints – recommendations

Because most Screen Composers and screen audio workers are freelancers, there is a justified fear of not being hired again if they directly raise legitimate concerns about stress levels impacting health and safety, or they raise concerns around bullying, harassment or unfair termination.



There should be a clause added to the SMSGNZ Composer template contract about standard operating procedures if bullying / harassment issues are raised by Screen Composers, especially relating to mediation and conflict resolution.

SMSGNZ could also investigate how other guilds handle complaints, to inform wording of the additional clause.

SMSGNZ could compile a directory of mediators and conflict resolution experts, which could be made available to members on request.

SMSGNZ could also partner with counselling and legal services (increasing revenue for advertising these services directly to members) where SMSGNZ offers members discounts when using these partnered services (Another incentive for potential members to join the guild).

Executive summary

While it is positive news that the new Government is not planning to remove current incentive schemes, it is unfortunate that funding levels will likely remain frozen for the foreseeable future.

With this in mind, it is important that NZFC, RFONZ, NZOA and TMP work with SMSGNZ to look at ways to maximise existing rebate opportunities, and incentivising international and local productions to use local Screen Composers.

The recommendations outlined below have been identified as the most practical ways to achieve this:

SMSGNZ should work with NZFC and RFONZ to promote the calibre and capability of New Zealand Composers and post-production facilities internationally, by producing and distributing a post-production attraction document specifically referencing New Zealand's screen sound and music capabilities, and incentives packages.

SMSGNZ, RFONZ and NZFC should target international production AND post-production companies.

SMSGNZ should work in collaboration with NZFC to make the PDV rebate more accessible, by discussing how removing the Special Production Vehicle (SPV) requirement for internationals could stimulate more work here.

SMSGNZ should work with NZFC to update and clarify the incentive points system with regards to post-production sound AND music in relation to the 5% uplift rebate.

SMSGNZ, NZOA and NZGDA should promote New Zealand Screen Composers to off shore gaming companies, highlighting rebate opportunities.

SMSGNZ should discuss and clarify with all funding agencies how to institute a rebate system for qualifying VR, AR and XR productions.

SMSGNZ should work with local funding agencies such as NZOA and TMP to encourage greater rebates, incentives and funding opportunities for local Producers if local productions use local Screen Composers.

SMSGNZ should reach out to potential commercial partners that can support the guild with revenue and benefits for members.

SMSGNZ should compile a fresh list of selling points, outlining the benefits that members would receive when they join the guild, as well as revised updates to the standard SMSGNZ Composer contracts.

SMSGNZ should begin a recruitment drive for screen music and sound workers in New Zealand to encourage more Screen Composers and sound workers to become members of the guild.