

PRODUCTION ACCOUNTING

CAREER SPOTLIGHT PANEL NOTES

The accounts department manages and tracks all the spending on a film or television projects. The key responsibilities are:

On large productions, this team can comprise 25 people.

1. Day to day expenditure

This is divided into two categories:

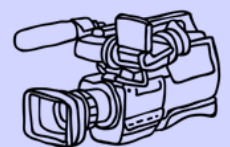
- **Accounts Payable**, ie. all expenses except payroll. There are a lot of expenditures on a film/tv production, including: equipment, premises, locations, transport, departmental budgets including construction costs, props, costumes, travel and accommodation, catering...
- **Payroll**: the salary of everyone employed on the project.

Construction is not just set builds. Wicked built a bespoke costumes dyeing room!

Up to 1,500 people were employed on Wicked, including 300 core staff.

2. Budgeting

- The responsibility of the Head of Department: the Production Accountant or (on larger projects) the Financial Controller.
- In pre-production, involves breaking down the schedule and creating a budget for approval.
- In production, weekly cost reports will be sent to the studio.



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Key skills to develop to succeed in this area:

Numeracy

It's not just about maths! Basic numeracy skills are useful, but you do not need an accounting background or formal qualification.

Ideally, you are the person who can roughly split the bill in your head at the end of a meal.

Communication

Possibly the most important skill to hone: you want people to like you and not hide things from you. Accounts are rarely on set but need to know everything that is going on. You also deal with crew a lot, eg. processing invoices. Being able to work with difficult people or have difficult conversations is important.

Teamwork

Be proactive, and offer to help others when finished with your own task. This is particularly helpful in your early career, as it gives you a better insight into the bigger picture of how a film comes together.

Efficiency

Being able to work quickly and efficiently is very important: there will be lots of filing to do, especially at the beginning!

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Entry Level

Clerk

- First couple of jobs
- Av. salary £750 p/w
- Support with expense claims, petty cash, and data entry, filing

Working hours are long during a shoot (11-hour days, ie. 8am - 7pm), so salaries are comparatively high.

Assistant Accountant

- Salary start at £800, progress to £1400 p/w
- Prep and record accounts payable, invoices, POs, petty cash, payroll

Supervisor

- Line-manage Payroll or Accounts Payable
- Average salary £1500 - £1700 p/w

1st Assistant

- Usually 1 or 2 on bigger projects
- More experienced accounting: QC, VAT returns, liaise with banks
- Salary £1400 (smaller films) - £2000 (bigger budgets)

Production Accountant

- Team management role Will take on FC duties on smaller projects
- Salary £2000 - £3000 p/w

Financial Controller

- Handles budgeting: is responsible for the project's overall financial management.
- Salary £4,000+ p/w

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Where to start

- Join Facebook groups, eg. London Production Accountants (2.5k members)
- Register on Filming in England's [Crew Directory](#) (free)
- In London, sign up to the [Equal Access Network](#) (free)
- Some of the big studios (eg. [NBCU](#)) offer accounting internships
- Once you have one film/tv credit, you can apply to register as a supplementary member on the [Production Guild Registry](#) (paid)
- Word of mouth is very important - make sure you keep in touch with (former) colleagues!

Suggested qualifications

There are no required qualifications for early entrants. ScreenSkills recommends looking at Level 3 qualifications (eg. BTEC or A Level) in business, accounting, maths for film/media.

As an alternative to A Level Maths, you can also consider Core Maths (equiv. AS Level), which covers topics such as VAT, tax credits, project management and prediction skills. For teachers, it offers opportunities for cross-departmental collaborations between maths & media/film departments.

Explore Further

- ScreenSkills' [Production Accountant](#) job profile

With huge thanks to our panellists: Jon Duncan, Reuel Guzman and Milla Lupton.