



Industry briefing

SUSTAINABILITY BEHIND THE SCREEN: ARE THINGS REALLY CHANGING?

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Summary

Sustainability policy and action across the UK Film and TV production sector has developed rapidly over the past decade. Yet carbon emissions per hour of screened content increased by 33% between 2022 and 2023¹. While some of this is down to more thorough data collection, especially from higher-emitting drama productions, it still points to a gap between the industry's environmental policy intentions and on-set realities.

To investigate this, a survey gathered responses from 52 production crew members across varied formats, genres, departments and experience levels. Interviews were also undertaken with six sustainability specialists and policymakers.

The results indicate that crew broadly value sustainability and want to act on it, but budgets, time-pressured schedules, decision-making hierarchies, workplace culture, and the industry's freelance, project-based structure all get in the way.

Why this matters

Climate change is a global crisis threatening health, food security, infrastructure, and economic stability worldwide. Film and TV production contributes disproportionately relative to the sector's size²: on average, **producing just one hour of content generates roughly the same amount of carbon emissions as a UK resident produces in a year and a half³**. This is driven by resource-intensive production

activities, with extensive travel typically making up most of a production's total emissions, followed by energy consumption (often still from diesel generators), and material usage⁴.

Meanwhile, the sector is one of the UK's most valuable creative industries, employing over 180,000 people and attracting significant inward investment⁵. In addition, the on-screen reach of content gives the sector real influence over public attitudes and societal values⁶, making sustainable action particularly critical.

What's already being done

BAFTA albert is leading the industry's sustainability efforts, providing a Carbon Calculator, Carbon Action Plan, training, and funding via the BFI's Sustainable Screen Fund⁷. Since this research concluded, the organisation has also had a major update, now offering more tailored resources for different productions and formats⁸. Since 2022, albert certification has been mandatory for new commissions from major UK broadcasters and streamers, including the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Sky and Netflix UK⁹. Other sustainability tools include the Green Memo, briefing cast and crew on sustainability expectations before filming¹⁰, and the Green Rider, letting talent request sustainable provisions in their contract¹¹.

This regulation sits alongside wider UK policy including the Environment Act (2021) and Net Zero targets for 2050¹².

Is it working?

Not consistently. Interviewees described a lack of shared standards: "there's no standardised framework," said one sustainability consultant, and "every studio has its own terminology," said a feature film coordinator. One participant also described a UK production adopting a US sustainability framework instead of using albert, purely due to the co-production's contract requirements.

Sustainability was also often described as a "bolt-on thing... that gets shoved to the side," with visible, low-cost measures, like cutting single-use plastics, prioritised over addressing higher-impact issues, like travel and transport choices and the use of diesel-generators¹³. And while measurement and reporting frameworks focus heavily on carbon emissions, participants also highlighted that other environmental impacts of production, like habitat destruction or noise pollution, get far less attention.

What we found

Crew care but can't/ don't always act. 81% of crew said that sustainability matters to them personally, yet 48% only "sometimes" use sustainability tools or guidance at work, and a quarter "never" do.

Budget and time are the main barriers. 51% said financial constraints limit sustainable action "most" or "all" of the time. One sustainability coordinator called budget "the number one pushback" against actions being taken. 45% said time pressure has a similar effect - sustainability tasks are often squeezed in around existing workloads, with one manager noting they "don't really get done properly" when people are "too busy to adapt."

Power sits above crew level. Most crew feel confident raising sustainability ideas, but far less confident they'll be acted on. 47% feel "not at all" or only "slightly" supported to act sustainably in their role. A sustainability lead argued that "people follow the money" and a broadcaster's Head of Sustainability agreed, stating "it's not always our money, sometimes it's the commissioner," suggesting that commissioners and funders hold power to enable change through budget allocations. Meanwhile on set, a production manager explained that decision-makers "will easily ignore [sustainability] to save time and money."

Sustainability isn't always taken seriously.

Some coordinators described being dismissed as "the bin police," with green initiatives mocked as "lad's banter." As one consultant put it, "the majority of people... making real changes are doing so just because they really personally care about it". When sustainable choices clashed with delivery goals, they were described as "easily ignored to save time and money." An early-career producer said that "most of what [they] do is push back against executives who do not care," explaining that sustainability only becomes a priority when visibly championed by senior figures, without which "it's very hard for others to push it."

Freelance, project-based work resists consistency.

Temporary teams mean sustainability expectations reset with every new production. Longer-running shows with stable teams, like ITV's *Emmerdale*, show what's possible when sustainability becomes routine rather than a one-off ask¹⁴.

Old habits persist. Sustainable practices are often seen as a threat to creativity, with new technologies viewed as "risky." This remains reinforced by a fixed "we've always done it this way" mindset and by reputation-based freelance work, where mistakes feel costly.

Change is coming anyway. "It's becoming the expectation... you'll get left behind," said one broadcaster's Head of Sustainability, reflecting the growing pressure from commissioners, funders, and industry regulators.

Recommendations for change

- 1. Ring-fence sustainability budgets and planning time.** Broadcasters, commissioners and funders should require dedicated sustainability planning during pre-production and ring-fence budget for it from the outset.
- 2. Train senior roles first.** Producers, directors and heads of department hold the most influence on set. Senior buy-in, more than written policy, decides whether sustainable ideas are implemented and encouraged.
- 3. Green Memos should be collaboratively made and visibly reinforced.** Green Memos should be informed – or replaced – by ongoing, role-specific conversations and visible reinforcement throughout production. Crew should be involved and valued – they know their roles and equipment best.
- 4. Standardise sustainability frameworks.** One approach led by BAFTA albert, replacing the current patchwork of toolkits and terminologies, would give productions consistent expectations, including across co-productions.
- 5. Challenge perceptions that sustainability is more expensive.** Despite widespread assumptions that environmental options are more costly¹⁵ and less effective, sustainable options – like solar and battery technologies – have become cheaper and more efficient in recent years.
- 6. Normalise a culture of sustainability.** The goal, as a broadcaster's Head of Sustainability explained, is to embed a "culture of sustainability" where sustainable practice is expected as standard, not dependent on individual crew who happen to care and have the resources to act.

¹ BAFTA albert [albert] (2024). BAFTA albert Annual Review 2023. BAFTA albert. Available at: <https://wearealbert.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/BAFTA-albert-Annual-Review-2023.pdf> [Accessed 1 Oct. 2025].

² Sørensen, I.E. and Noonan, C. (2022). Production, policy and power: the screen industry's response to the environmental crisis. *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(1), pp.172–184. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437211065697> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

³ Albert (2024), p. 12

⁴ Albert, BFI and Arup (2020). A Screen New Deal: A route map to sustainable film production. Available at: <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/2940/download> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].; Hayward, K. (2024). *Green Filmmaking*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis.; Gillanders, A. (2025). *Greening the Screen: Tackling ESG Challenges in the UK Film and TV Industry*. ESG Foundation. Available at: <https://esgfoundation.org/greening-the-screen-tackling-esg-challenges-in-the-uk-film-and-tv-industry> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

⁵ ScreenSkills (2025). New National Occupational Standards and Sustainability Skills Checklists Launched. ScreenSkills. Available at: <https://www.screenskills.com/news/new-national-occupational-standards-and-sustainability-skills-checklists-launched/> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].; British Film Institute [BFI] (2026). Official BFI statistics reveal £6.8 billion film and high-end TV production spend in the UK. BFI. Available at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/official-bfi-statistics-2025> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

⁶ Rahmani, B., Montano, B., Groves, D.W. and Green, D.P. (2025). The persuasive effects of narrative entertainment: a meta-analysis of recent experiments. *Behavioural Public Policy*, pp.1–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2025.10010> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

⁷ Albert (2024); BFI (n.d.). Sustainability. BFI. Available at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/strategy-policy/policy-statements/sustainability> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

⁸ Albert (2026). Re-Introducing BAFTA Albert. BAFTA Albert. Available at: <https://baftaalbert.org/news/re-introducing-bafta-albert/> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].; Feser, P. (2026). Going

through a company rebrand, publishing an industry report, and developing a new carbon calculator – all in a year at BAFTA Albert... LinkedIn post. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/paolo-feser-6896bb198_going-through-a-company-rebrand-publishing-activity-7459622530404868096-kvsO/ [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

⁹ BBC (2021). Sustainable productions: albert certification to become mandatory delivery requirement. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/commissioning/news/albert-certification-climate-creatives-september-2021> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].; albert (2024).

¹⁰ Albert (2019). Sending out a Green Memo. BAFTA albert. Available at: <https://wearealbert.org/2019/12/13/sending-out-a-green-memo/> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2025].

¹¹ Equity (2023). Equity for a Green New Deal. Available at: <https://www.equity.org.uk/media/rr0i41oi/green-rider-august-2023.pdf> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

¹² Burnett, N., Stewart, I. and Hewitt, T. (2026). The UK's Plans and Progress to Reach Net Zero by 2050. House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9888/CBP-9888.pdf> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

¹³ Albert, BFI and Arup (2020)

¹⁴ Albert (2024); ITV Careers (2025). How Productions 'Crew Up'. ITV Careers. Available at: <https://careers.itv.com/teams/itv-studios/itv-studios-uk/how-productions-crew-up> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].

¹⁵ Albert, BFI and Arup (2020).; Hadas, L. (2024). Supporting Professionalisation of the Sustainability Department in UK Screen Production: Expertise for a Sustainable Industry. University of Nottingham: Institute for Screen Industries Research. Available at: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/isir/documents/supporting-professionalisation-of-the-sustainability-department-in-uk-screen-production-sept-2024.pdf> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2026].