

# GENERAL PRACTICE or SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPHER (High Street Photographer)

## Skillset careers fact sheet

This is one of a series of Fact Sheets on the photo imaging sector developed by industry experts to help people new to the sector understand the different job roles and the skills required in order to succeed. Fact Sheets are based on Job Profiles developed by Skillset. For the full list of *Job Profiles for the Audio Visual Industries*, visit [www.skillset.org](http://www.skillset.org). We aim to keep this information as current as possible - a fully updated version will be available in the Winter of 2006. All Fact Sheets can be downloaded and printed from our website [www.skillset.org/careers](http://www.skillset.org/careers). To give us feedback, e-mail [careers@skillset.org](mailto:careers@skillset.org).

This work of the General Practice (GP) or Social Photographer is varied and interesting, and can be both financially and creatively rewarding. Activities typically combine a blend of social, advertising, commercial and industrial photography. However, the main source of income for most GPs is undoubtedly social photography, which embraces individual and family portraiture and the formal recording of family and social occasions, such as weddings, anniversaries and other special events.

Approximately half of all photographers work as General Practice Photographers, providing high quality photographic services for their local communities.

### The work

The General Practice Photographer usually works from a studio located in a prominent town centre location, or in some cases, sets up temporary studios in department stores or supermarkets. These mobile facilities are particularly popular with customers wishing to commission portraits of children and pets, and are also useful for promoting events photography. In addition to traditional studio portraiture, there is an increasing demand to shoot social portraits in the sitter's home or workplace. Weekend working is unavoidable, particularly during the lucrative summer wedding season.

Many GPs work for local businesses and advertising agencies, producing images for use on posters, in brochures and other promotional material. They may also supplement their income working for local newspapers or producing images for sale through photo libraries and websites.

While some GPs carry out their own processing and printing, most establish good relationships with a professional laboratory and concentrate on taking photographs. The advent of high-quality digital photography means that many GPs now carry out their own digitisation, scanning and image manipulation work. However, this may add greatly to the photographer's workload, and can prove a false economy for inexperienced practitioners.

The GP's biggest competitor is the serious amateur photographer. GPs must therefore have an effective marketing strategy supporting a value-added service that an amateur cannot hope to match. This is typically achieved by offering a combination of web-based ordering systems, professional image enhancing services, a faster turnaround, larger prints, photo-DVDs, bound albums or professional framing services. GPs may therefore spend a significant proportion of their time on marketing promotions and other aspects of running a small business, rather than taking photographs.

### Essential knowledge and skills

Successful GPs need to be well organised, practical and versatile in order to succeed in this competitive area. In addition to their visual flair and technical abilities, GPs need to have good business and administrative skills, strong motivation, and the self-confidence to promote themselves widely.

GPs must be able to master a wide range of different areas and styles of photography, and the related lighting techniques. They should also keep up to date with the latest digital processes and image manipulation software to ensure they are not left stranded by this rapidly evolving technology. Sophisticated systems are available for viewing and ordering prints online, and GPs should seek to embrace and exploit this web-based technology in order to remain successful.

While General Practice Photography is not as stressful as some other areas of professional photography, customer expectations surrounding portraiture and events photography can be very high. GPs therefore need to develop excellent communications and interpersonal skills: weddings are often exercises in crowd



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control, while coaxing a natural smile out of a nervous subject or an unwilling child requires patience and charm. GPs should exercise caution and common sense in all interactions with their subjects, as well as being punctual, discreet and well mannered. But above all, they must provide a consistently high quality of service to members of the public.

### **Training and qualifications**

No set academic qualifications are required to work as a GP. There are, however, many excellent college courses around the country which provide a thorough technical grounding in the various areas of photography that GPs are expected to master. Some colleges also operate effective work placement schemes, which help students make contacts and gain invaluable experience before they graduate. The Professional Qualifying Examination (PQE), which is offered by the British Institute of Professional Photography (BIPP), has a good reputation with employers. It is usually linked to an HND course, leading to a degree as well as the PQE.

Many GPs have no academic training and instead start out by assisting an established photographer, or group of photographers, and learn the various creative, technical and business skills on the job (see the Fact Sheet for Assistant Photographer). Prospective employers may request to see a portfolio of photographs – this should be well presented and consist of 10 to 15 photographs, that reveal a broad range of skills and competencies.

Employers may support work-based qualifications, such as Apprenticeships and NVQ/SVQs. Apprenticeships are available in Photo Imaging, incorporating Key Skills, a Technical Certificate (C&G 6924), and an NVQ at level 2 or 3. NVQ/SVQs are available at levels 2, 3 and 4 in Photography, levels 2, 3 and 4 in Digital Imaging, and levels 3 and 4 in Digital Photography & Imaging.

Membership of a professional association such as the British Institute of Professional Photography (BIPP), the Society of Wedding & Portrait Photographers (SWPP) and Master Photographers Association (MPA) may also be beneficial. These associations offer a range of qualifications, usually awarded after portfolio submission, enabling a candidate to benchmark their skills against other successful practitioners working in the industry.

### **Health and Safety**

Photographers may be subject to physical stresses from carrying heavy camera equipment and lighting indoors and out, in all seasons, come rain or shine. They should therefore seek advice about appropriate techniques for lifting and moving equipment. In addition, GPs need to understand Health and Safety legislation, and should be capable of assessing and managing the risks and potential dangers associated with the use of electrical lighting, equipment and props. They should also ensure that they have a current Public Liability insurance policy to cover their working practices.

### **Where to go for more information**

**Skillset** is the Sector Skills Council for the Audio Visual Industries. For information about training and professional qualifications, links to the Skillset network of training partners, and access to the comprehensive Skillset course database, visit [www.skillset.org](http://www.skillset.org)

**Skillset Careers** is the UK's only specialist media careers advice service delivering individual career solutions when and how you need them. For detailed media careers information and advice, contact one of the free careers helplines. Call **0808 300 900** in England (also available to callers from Wales and Northern Ireland) or **0808 100 8094** in Scotland, or visit the website [www.skillset.org/careers](http://www.skillset.org/careers)

**The British Institute of Professional Photography (BIPP)** is a not for profit association of professional image makers that aims to improve standards, develop skills and encourage continuing professional development. The BIPP recognise over thirty colleges across the UK who have proved that they have the resources, facilities and expert lecturers necessary to run an effective professional photographic course. For details of BIPP Qualifications for practising professionals, visit the Membership pages on the BIPP website [www.bipp.com](http://www.bipp.com). For a list of approved colleges, including those offering the PQE, e-mail [mberry@bipp.com](mailto:mberry@bipp.com). Student membership is available to students attending a vocational course in photography at an educational establishment in the UK. The Institute's journal *The Photographer* is supplied free to all members. **T: 01920 464011**

**The Association of Photographers (AOP)** is a trade association of professional photographers, who campaign vigorously for photographers' rights and have had a key influence on the development of professional photography in the UK. Their publication *Beyond the Lens* is widely recognised as the definitive industry guide to copyright and licensing law, ethics and business practice. The AOP has a number of affiliated colleges and promotes, maintains and develops relationships between education and the professional industry. It also publishes *IMAGE* magazine, which reports on current trends in professional photography and image making. [www.the-aop.org](http://www.the-aop.org) **T: 020 7739 6669**

**The Royal Photographic Society (RPS)** is the industry's 'learned body'. Established over 150 years ago, it aims to promote the art and science of Photography. It awards distinctions that are recognised throughout the world and has established specialist interest groups, and meetings for its members, who are drawn from both amateur and professional photographers. It publishes a monthly Journal. [www.rps.org](http://www.rps.org)