

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. 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. To give us feedback, e-mail careers@skillset.org.

The Photographic Printer works in a laboratory or a retail outlet to produce prints from negatives, transparencies and digital files. Their work may also involve scanning images and burning (saving) them to CD. Laboratories usually produce prints using specialist electronic machines. Some fine art, advertising photography and black and white work, is still printed by hand under an enlarger in a darkroom, and processed on a separate paper processor, but this type of work (called "hand printing") is diminishing. Photography is increasingly a digital process. Mini labs and photofinishers use the similar types of machines to the professional laboratory, but quickly mass-produce prints for a High Street retail chain or postal customers. Their work requires a lower level of skill than the professional laboratory. Professional laboratories work to a very high standard and provide prints that meet the individual needs of professional photographers or businesses like advertising agencies. The photographic printer may have experience in different types of laboratory, or join a professional laboratory in a trainee role and gain training and experience on the job.

The work

The printer will set up the machines each morning, mixing chemicals for processing if required, and running pre-exposed control strips through the machine to check it is operating correctly. The printer will sort and load films for processing, and when printing they will make colour and density corrections in order to produce the best result for the client. Work areas need to be kept scrupulously clean and free of dust, so it is normal to wear white lint-free gloves and a white lab coat when handling film. The printers will have to organise their own workflow to achieve maximum efficiency, but finished work is usually sent to a more senior person for inspection. The printer may not be at the machine all day, as laboratories frequently require their staff to be multi-skilled and become involved in other areas, such as print finishing. Other work, much of it now digital, may include film duplicating and retouching. A junior printer will not have much customer contact initially, but as they become more experienced this will increase, particularly in high street mini labs where there is a high degree of customer interface. Laboratories usually have fluctuations in their workload due to seasonal demand. Large laboratories sometimes require shift work.

Essential knowledge and skills

A printer must have a responsible attitude toward working with their materials, partly for safety reasons and partly for cost – damage to originals can be extremely expensive to put right. They need to be able to interpret client's instructions accurately. The volume of work may be large and they need to work under pressure to meet deadlines.

A Photographic Printer needs:

- an interest in photography, computers and science
- to be polite and confident with clients and interpret instructions accurately
- not be daunted by the volume of work, but be steady and methodical
- normal colour vision to match colours and see differences in shades. This is essential
- to be able to work both individually and as part of a team

Typical career routes

Working in a mini lab can be a useful starting point as there are hundreds around the country. Photofinishing laboratories employ semi-skilled people to operate computer-controlled machinery, but in order to gain further experience, it will be necessary to move to a professional laboratory role. Opportunities exist for progression to become a Digital Imaging Technician, or a Senior Technician, and into management.

England Helpline
08080 300 900

Scotland Helpline
0808 100 8094

www.skillset.org/careers

Training and qualifications

No formal qualifications are needed to start but it is important to have a good general education and good IT skills. It is not necessary to have any specific GCSEs, although an interest in maths, science and photography is desirable. A basic understanding of Photoshop is useful. People can start work straight from school, and most training is "on the job". Employers may support apprenticeships and encourage their technicians to gain the relevant NVQs/SVQs in Mini lab processing or Laboratory Operations. Manufacturers generally provide specific training when a laboratory buys a new piece of equipment.

Health and Safety

It is important for everyone working with computers, machinery and chemicals to be aware of health and safety, and to follow the relevant regulations and guidelines supplied by the manufacturers.

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

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

Professional Photographic Laboratories Association

Their website contains details of member companies.

www.ppla.pmai.org

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 **T: 020 7739 6669**