

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.

There is a constant demand for photographs from publishers and producers of newspapers, magazines, TV programmes, films and videos; from advertising and branding organisations, and electronic media of all kinds. Picture Researchers are employed to obtain the best images to illustrate and enhance a client's brief, using their research skills, experience, judgment and creative lateral thinking. They may be full or part-time employees of a specific media organisation, or independent freelance operators. They put together an exciting and imaginative range of photographs from various libraries, agencies or the work of individual photographers around the world so their client or employer can make the final selection. Picture libraries and agencies cover every possible type of image from architecture to space travel, food to fashion, both historical and contemporary. These sources can be the work of independent photographers, commercial companies, or libraries attached to museums or academic and scientific institutions. A Picture Researcher will learn the best places to go for certain types of images, who is marketing their photographs where, and keep up to date with what photographers are shooting. Sometimes clients request photographs of situations or people that could not possibly exist (such as events occurring before the invention of photography), so the Picture Researcher must have good general knowledge, be alert to going on "wild goose" chases, and have the ability to come up with a successful solution to any given problem (perhaps by suggesting a photograph of a contemporary engraving, or of a cartoon or painting that is relevant). This may require considerable tact.

The work

Picture Researchers take a brief from a client about the images required. They will discuss at the outset what the client needs to achieve with the photographs, for example, what mood they need to set; what facts they have to illustrate; what must be prioritised, and their deadlines. They may search for these images in person at a library, or by telephone with a call to a Picture Library Researcher for a detailed discussion, and use a library's keyword search facilities online to find relevant material. Following advances in digital technology, the majority of images are now available online, although many picture libraries will still have parts of their collections yet to be scanned. Most picture libraries will still supply transparencies or prints directly to the client, or scan images for supply electronically via ISDN, FTP, e-mail or on CDs. The Picture Researcher has to consider whether the images will be reproduced in colour, or black & white; whether landscape or portrait format is required; the anticipated size of reproduction; the audience they are aimed at; the budget available and what rights they need to purchase for these pictures. They are responsible for making the client aware of any licensing and copyright restrictions attached to the selected images, and warn the client if the way they propose to use them risks breaking any laws on privacy, defamation, trademarks or false endorsement. Picture Researchers often build up a reputation for a specialist subject area, such as wildlife or medicine, or for a particular end product, such as books or TV programmes. They may have to write caption information for the pictures they select. Picture Researchers also commission photography and organise shoots both on location and in studios.

Essential knowledge and skills

A good Picture Researcher will have developed an "eye" for the best pictures and be able to visualise what the client wants. They should provide a relevant selection of images for the client to choose from that allows their designers sufficient flexibility, without deluging them with too much material. A large proportion of the work is administrative, so a Picture Researcher needs good IT skills (both PC and Mac). They must have an excellent visual memory and be able to creatively interpret a brief. Good general knowledge is necessary, and a willingness to learn fast and show interest in subjects they may not have any previous knowledge of. An awareness of and active interest in current affairs can be very important.



England Helpline
08080 300 900

Scotland Helpline
0808 100 8094

www.skillset.org/careers

A Picture Researcher needs:

- Visual literacy and normal colour vision
- Good research, administrative, organisational and communication skills
- Knowledge of the law, including copyright, as it relates to the use of photographs
- Attention to detail
- Ability to cost a project and work to a brief within budget

Typical career routes

Working as a researcher for a picture library or agency will provide valuable experience and good client contact. Typically people start in a library as an assistant or as a digital scanner. Larger libraries expect 2/3 years experience in a smaller library before they employ someone as Picture Researcher.

Many Picture Library Researchers successfully transfer to the client side of the business. Work experience on a publication or as an assistant to a Picture Researcher are also excellent starting points, as is temporary or shift work on a Picture Desk of a publication. Once established, with several years experience, many Picture Researchers find the flexibility of working freelance is attractive.

Training and qualifications

Any specialist knowledge is valuable, and degrees in history, art history, languages, social history, sciences, and anthropology are all useful to have. There are courses available in picture research, which give a good overview of the work involved, together with a detailed understanding of key areas of responsibility such as copyright law. BAPLA and the Picture Research Association list affiliated courses on their websites, but most people still learn largely on the job. The facility to interpret a client's brief is a skill which comes with experience, as is the ability to handle clients and negotiation skills.

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 **08080 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

British Association of Picture Libraries and Agencies (BAPLA)

BAPLA is the UK trade association for picture libraries and agencies and the largest organisation of its kind in the world, with over 400 member companies. Their vacancies board is the most comprehensive listing of current opportunities available. Many individual libraries' websites (eg Getty Images www.gettyimages.com) contain information on training and job vacancies.

www.bapla.org.uk T: 020 7713 1780

Picture Research Association

A professional organisation for experienced picture researchers, picture editors and anyone specifically involved in the research, management and supply of visual material to the media industry. www.picture-research.org.uk

The Media section of *The Guardian* (www.media.guardian.co.uk) (Saturday and Monday in the print edition) is the most comprehensive source of externally advertised vacancies in picture libraries and for picture researchers.