SAGE
South African Guild of Editors

Post-production in 2013

Survey report

Post-production in 2013: survey report

South African Guild of Editors

Starting in 2013, SAGE is running an annual survey to gauge opinions of editors and producers on issues concerning post-production and SAGE.

INTRODUCTION

The survey was run for 3 months, from mid-November 2013 to mid-February 2014. Public respondents were requested via our mailing lists and social media. Responses were incentivised with two prizes:

- For editors, 50% off a Labspace training course.
- For producers, R500 voucher for Digital Depot.

The surveys saw 38 producer respondents and 144 editor respondents.

For all graphs, responses from editors are drawn in blue ■, producers in green ■.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the survey. Thank you also to our two sponsors, Labspace and Digital Depot.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Generally, the survey results confirm hunches we've had for many years. There were some surprises, too. Of course, these responses are limited to our sample: 145 editors and 38 producers, generally with some experience, and almost all from Gauteng and Western Cape.

Some stand-out results:

- Editors find work primarily through past relationships and word of mouth, and are hired for both their technical and creative expertise. Read more

- More than 50% of editors and producer respondents reported working/hiring on a global rate. Read more

- Nearly 40% of both editors and producers reported an edit day as consisting of 10 hours, and more than 40% of both agreed that an edit week is 5 days long. Read more

- 65% of editors reported not charging overtime. 42% or producers reported not paying overtime. Read more

- Roughly 75% of editors feel that they do not have enough time to complete their work, while roughly 75% of producers feel they do. Read more

- An overwhelming majority of both editors and producers agreed that directors of photography earn more than editors. A smaller majority agreed that this was not fair. Read more

1. ABOUT THE SURVEY SAMPLE

1.1. Seniority and experience

The majority of our respondents consider themselves senior, though their reported years of experience show a more even spread between what SAGE considers junior (1 to 4 years), mid-level (5 to 9) and senior (10+). The average reported experience was 8.24 years, with the median at 7 years.
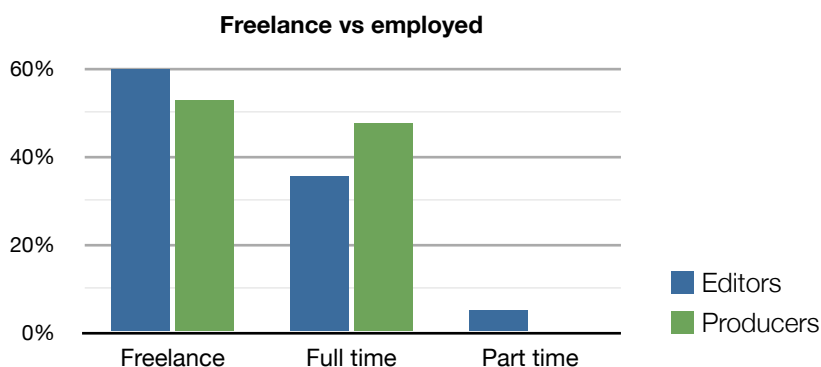
Seniority

Years experience
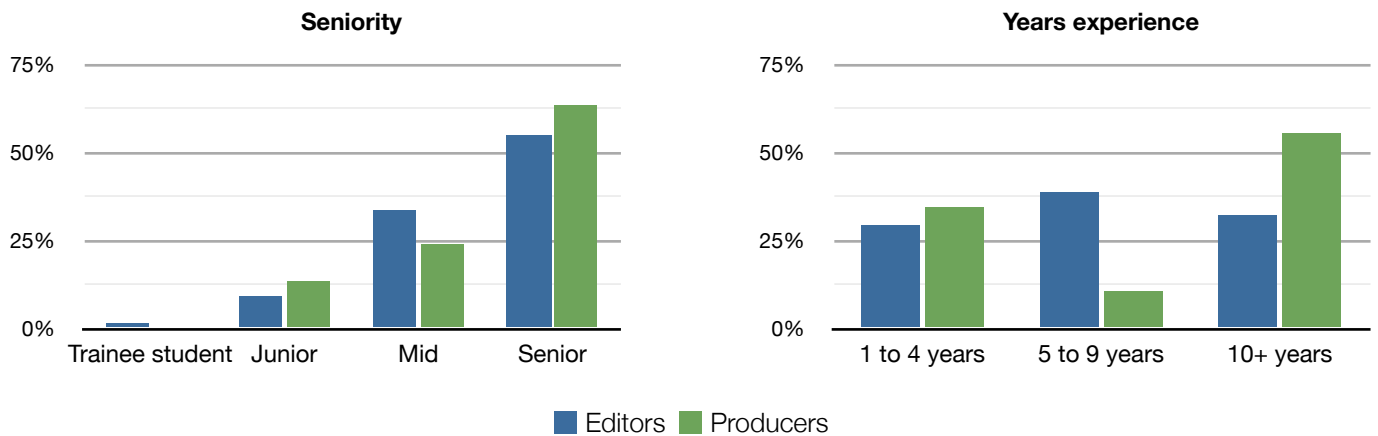
Editors Producers

1.2. Region

The majority of respondents hailed from Western Cape or Gauteng:

Region
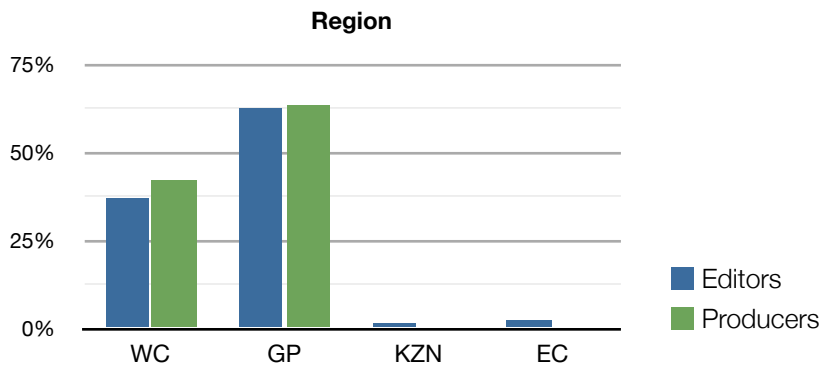
Editors

Producers

1.3. Employment type

In line with expectations, a higher proportion of editors are freelance (±60%) vs producers (±50%).

Freelance vs employed

Editors

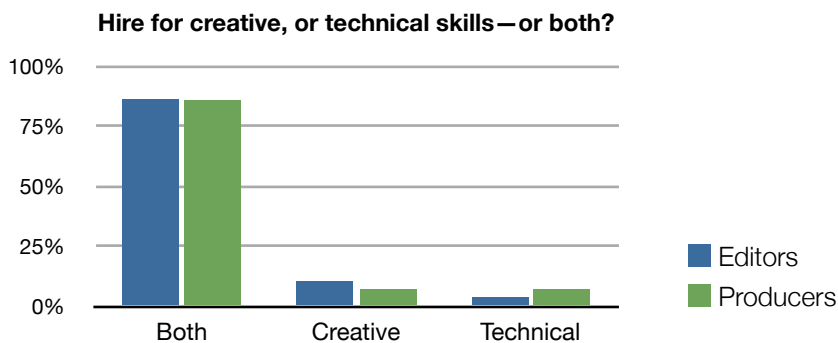Producers

2. THE JOB MARKET

2.1. Finding work

Our respondents rated a multiple-choice answer, selecting all the ways they found work. Quite understandably, producers tend to use past relationships a little more while editors rely on word of mouth. No producers reported using an agent to find an editor.

How do you find work / find editors?
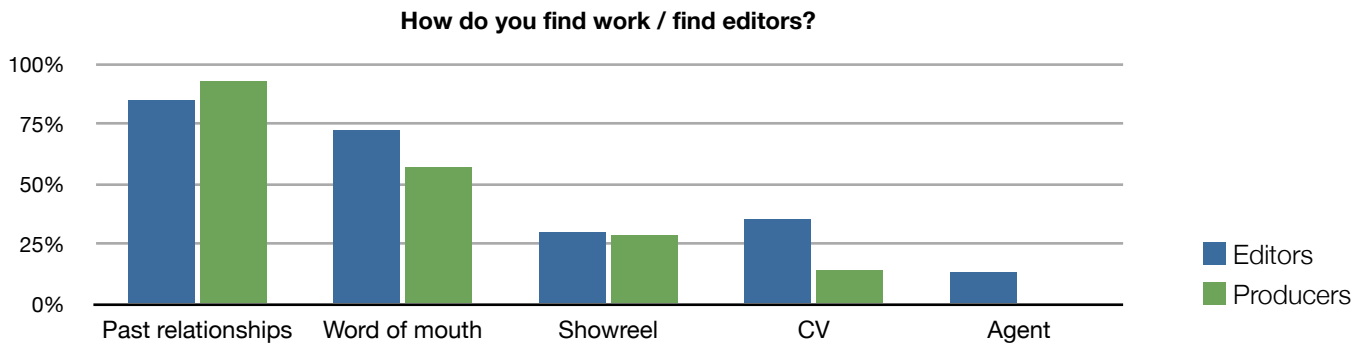
2.2. Skills required

Editors and producers agreed overwhelmingly: that editors are hired for both their technical and creative skills.

Hire for creative, or technical skills—or both?


2.3. Annual amount of work

Our editor respondents work an average of ±5 jobs a year, producers a little bit less at 3.5 jobs a year. For editors, corporates and commercials provide significantly above-average jobs per year, which is expected. Unexpected, though, is the amount of editors and producers reporting 'other' job types.

Jobs, annual average

Jobs, annual type average
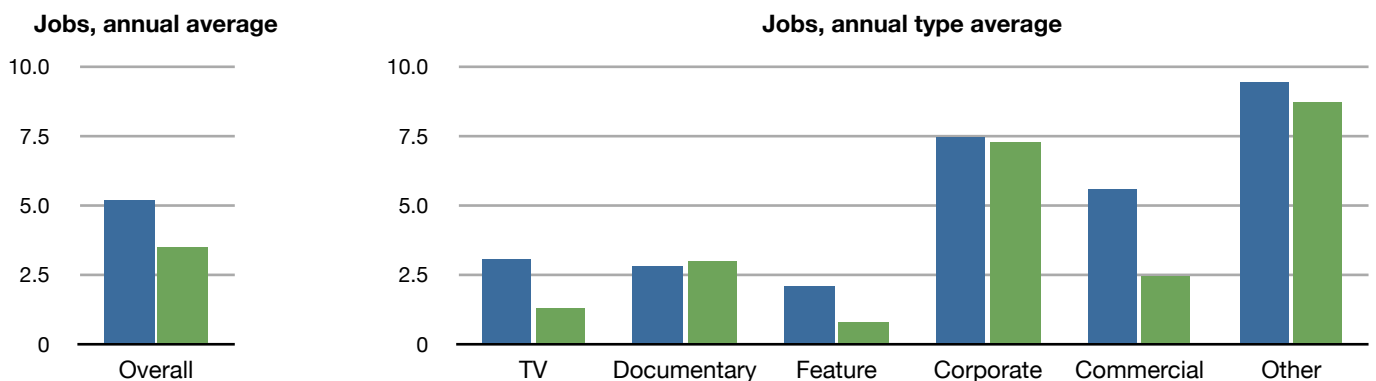
3. NEGOTIATIONS AND PAY

3.1. The editor's rate

The all-important rate. We asked editors what they thought of their rate in the last year, and producers what they thought of the rates they paid to editors.

What do you think of the edit rate you pay/are paid?

How does your edit rate compare to SAGE's?
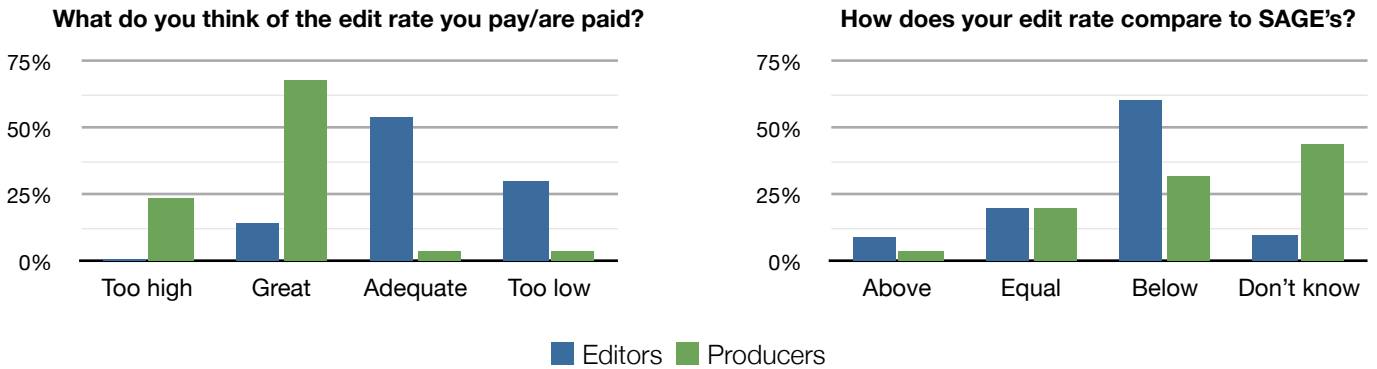
Editors felt their rates could be better, while producers felt editors' rates were between 'too high' and 'great'. This is a little alarming when compared to feelings about the SAGE rate card—the closest we got to actually reporting rates. Here, we see that 60% of editors feel their rates are below the 2013 SAGE rate card, which we consider a reasonable-to-low representation of what editors should be paid.

This is all the more concerning when considering the average editor respondent has ±8 years of experience. We feel that a professional with this much experience should be earning at the upper end of our rate card, or above.

Tempting as it may be to blame producers, it seems that both parties are partly responsible; nearly 50% of editors said their rate was 'adequate'. If your rate is below the SAGE rate card, we can't see how it could be considered adequate. On the producers' side, a large 45% portion reported not knowing of the SAGE rate card, so there's work for editors (and SAGE) in getting our rate card more exposure.

(Note that the terms we used in the survey read "unreasonably high" and "unreasonably low".)

3.2. Fee structure

Editors and producers both reported that just over half their edits are commissioned on a global per-project fee. This structure tends to strongly incentivise the editor, but also shoulders them with the risk of the project running over schedule. We urge editors to always agree on an edit duration, even when accepting a global fee.

**Do you work/pay a global or time-based fee?**
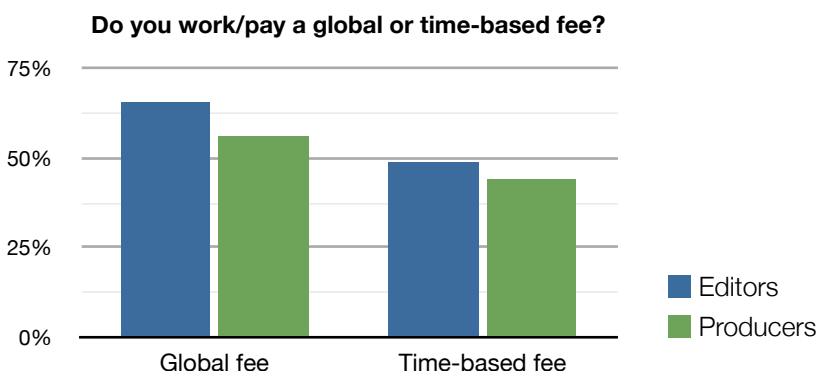
3.3. Dropping rates

In a freelance environment, negotiating a rate drop seems almost inevitable. Producers and editors mostly agreed on the reasons to drop a rate, but editors seem to be over-emphasising relationship building.
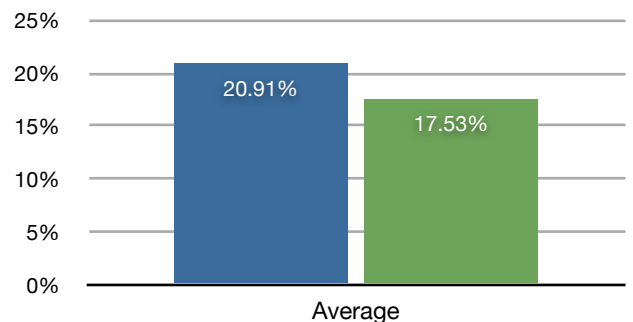
Why should editors drop their rates?
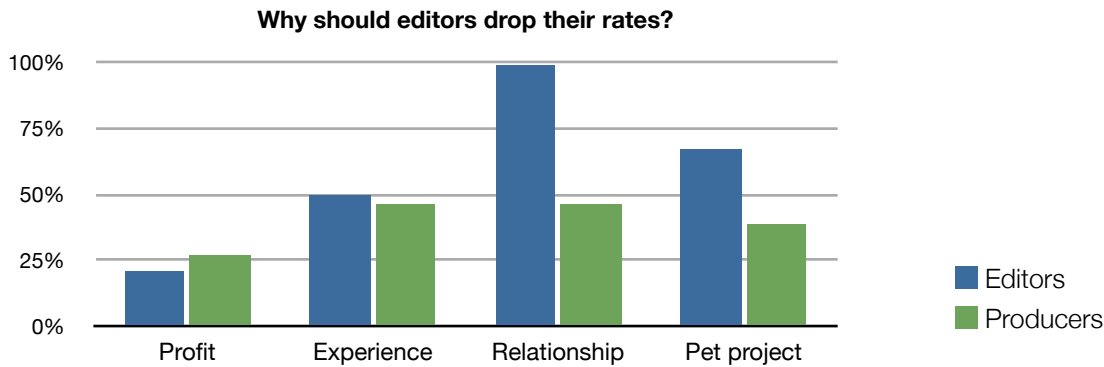
We also wondered about the specifics of dropping rates. What length of job warrants a rate discussion, and how much should the editor consider dropping their rate?

For how many weeks of work should an editor drop their rate?
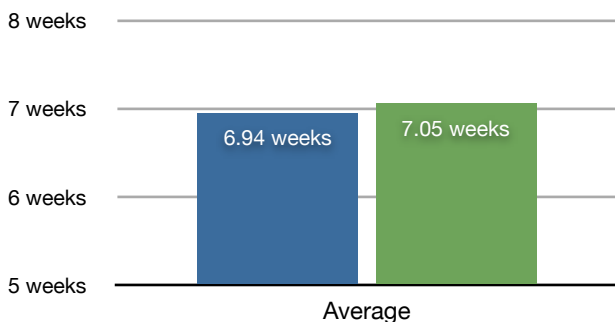
How much should an editor drop their rate?

Producers and editors closely agreed on the duration: around 7 weeks of work is worth considering cutting your rate. A small difference in how much the rate should drop was evidenced: 21% from editors, 17.5% from producers.

We expected producers would ask for a larger rate drop for a shorter job, while the results show the opposite. This is perhaps a cautionary result for editors: negotiate harder on how much you cut your rate, as producers may be happier with a lower cut than you think.

4. WORKING CONDITIONS

4.1. Contracts

Like most of the film and television industry, employment contracting is a rather mixed bag.

It is encouraging to see that a third of editors report signing a specific post-production contract. However, another third of editors report contracting verbally, the weakest of all options. We urge editors to confirm verbal agreements in writing—even an email is better than a phone call.

Producers report a far more even spread of contracting, with a slight bias towards a specific post-production contract. SAGE discourages the use of standard crew contracts for post-production, as these tend to misrepresent the conditions of work—normally featuring crewing hours and work weeks, for example. We recommend that editors modify any standard crew contract they are offered.

**What kind of contract do you sign?**
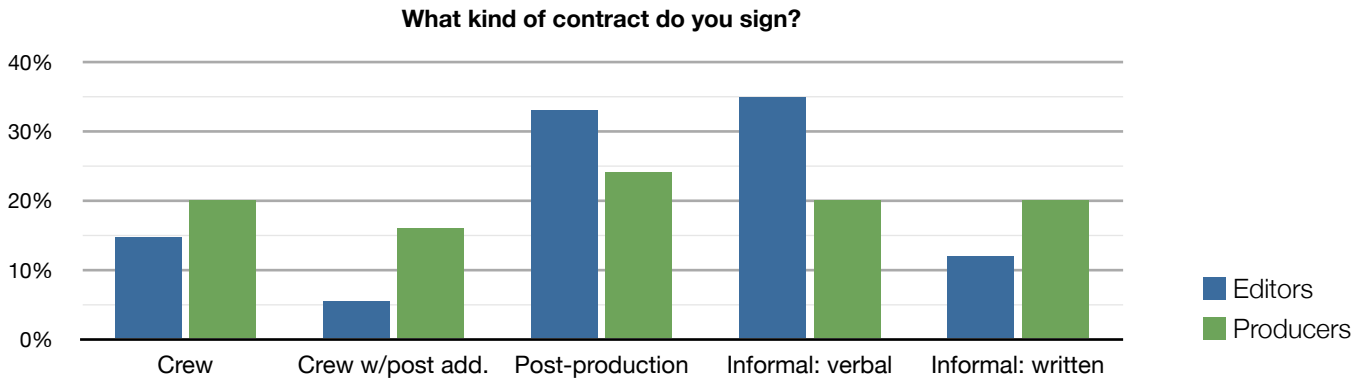
4.2. The production process

Hiring the editor early in production is one of the easiest ways to improve the quality of the post-production process. Simply signing the editor for the job that will take place once shooting is completed (or begun) allows for feedback into the production process. It is encouraging to see that 60% of producers report hiring during pre-production.

When in the production process are/do you hired?
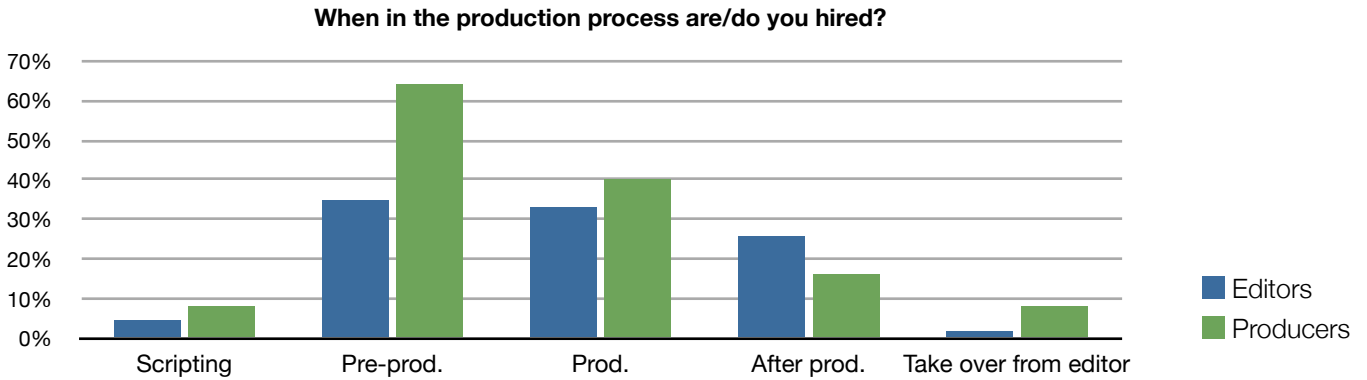

4.3. Discussions on style

Including the editor in discussions on style is a related benefit of hiring early. At any stage of production, a discussion on style in another simple way to improve the quality of post-production. A majority of producers and editors agreed.

Are you included in discussions on project style?
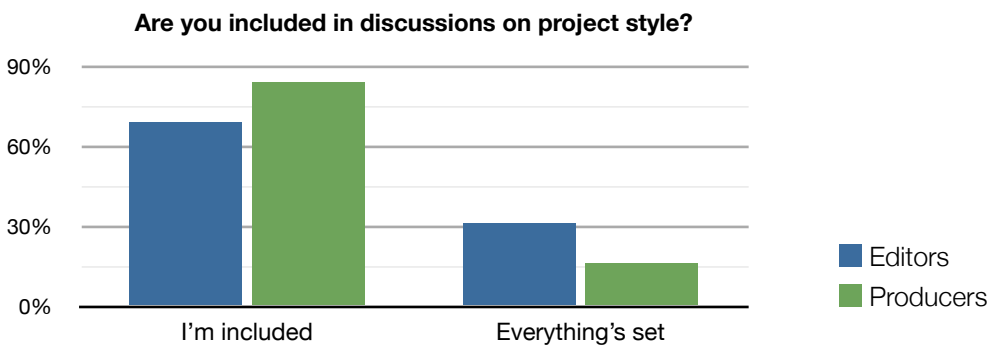
4.4. The working day and week

SAGE advocates for a 10-hour edit day (including a one hour lunch break), and the majority of editors and producers agreed: average responses of 9.93 and 9.64 hours per day, for editors and producers respectively. While shoot days are normally scheduled on a 12-hour day, it is encouraging to note the strong agreement on a 10-hour edit day. Consider that editors work their hours solidly, whereas time on set generally involves a great deal of waiting for any one crew member.

**How many hours are there in a standard edit day?**
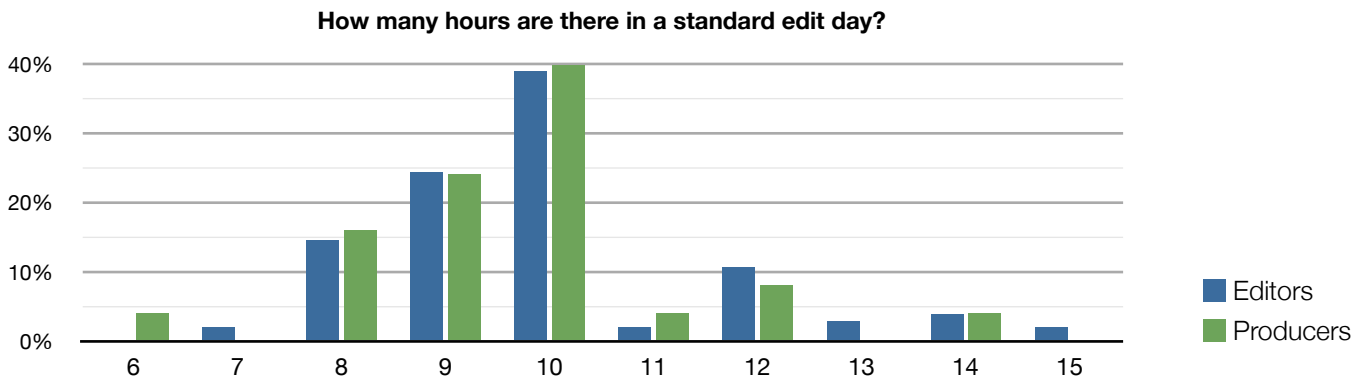
A majority of editors reported five day week, while producers are more divided: 40% reporting a six day week. SAGE recommends a five day week in our annual rate-card, considering the sixth day excess time. While productions are often shot on a six day week, we feel that duplicating this in post-production harms the quality of work and burns editors out. If the shoot is completed with enough time for post-production (and the editor is not on a global fee), then working 5 days versus 6 only has benefits.

How many work days are there in a normal week?
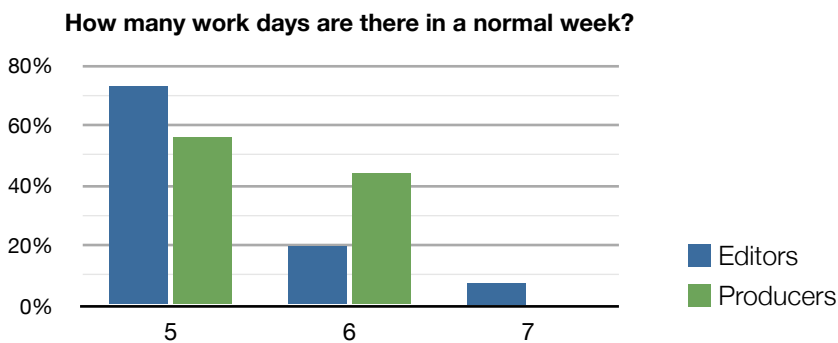
4.5. Excess time

Alarmingly, 65% of editors reported not charging for excess time, above the producers rate of 42%. While free overtime can be used to make up for an editor's mistake, it is all too often used as a way to force a larger edit into a smaller number of days. The lack of knowledge regarding SAGE's overtime rates is similarly disturbing.

Do you charge/pay for excess time?

Compare the excess rate to SAGE's recommendation?
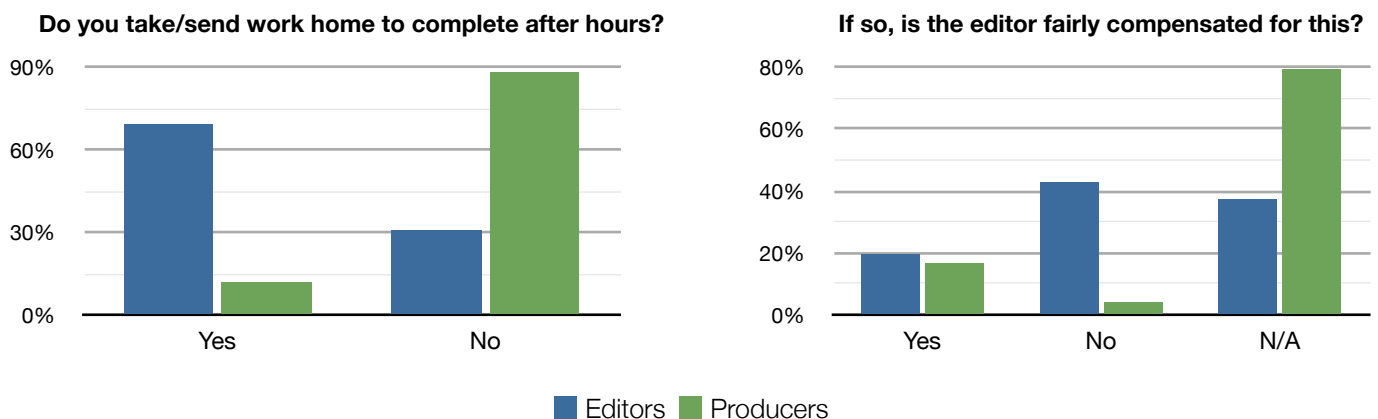
■ Editors ■ Producers
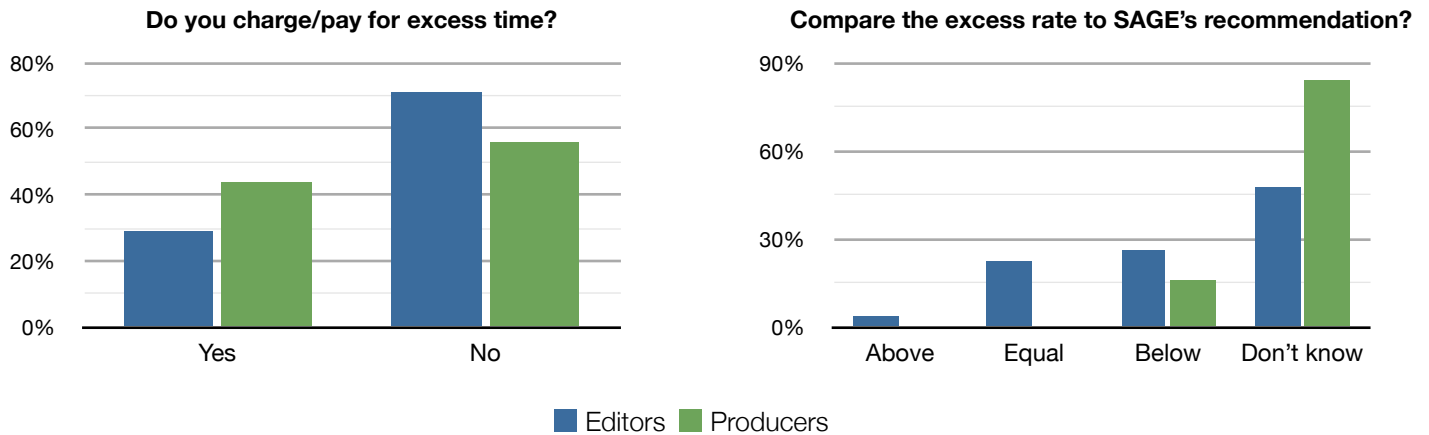
While we're here, we recommend:

Time after 10 hours charged at 1.5x, time after 14 hours charged at 2x.
6th day and public holidays charged at 1.5x, 7th day charged at 2x—both with a minimum call of 10 hours.

4.6. Taking work home

As computers and software get cheaper, editors are beginning to take work home to complete after hours. It appears that editors are volunteering to take work home. Compare this with editors feelings on the post-production schedule below. This is a new trend that will be closely watched in future surveys.

Do you take/send work home to complete after hours?

If so, is the editor fairly compensated for this?

■ Editors ■ Producers

# 5. THE POST-PRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT

5.1. The scheduling process

Unsurprisingly, 74% of editors feel that they don't have enough time in the edit, while 76% of producers feel they do. Both these impulses are healthy, but perhaps they are a little too divergent. It is encouraging to see that 84% of producers said that editors are involved in post-production scheduling.

Do you feel enough time is scheduled for the editing process?
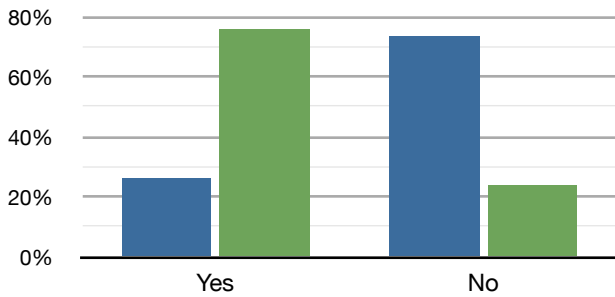
**Is the editor involved in the post-prod. scheduling?**
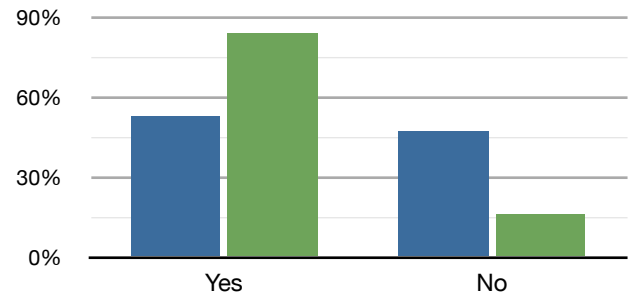
■ Editors ■ Producers

## 5.2. The director and the editor

Spending time with the director in the edit suite is a great way to increase the quality of the post-production work. Editors reported spending a quarter of their edit time with the director, which is quite a healthy number. Producers reported 40% of the edit being done in the presence of the director.

What proportion of the edit is done with the director?

24.96%

41.61%

■ Editors
■ Producers

Proportion of edit time spent with director
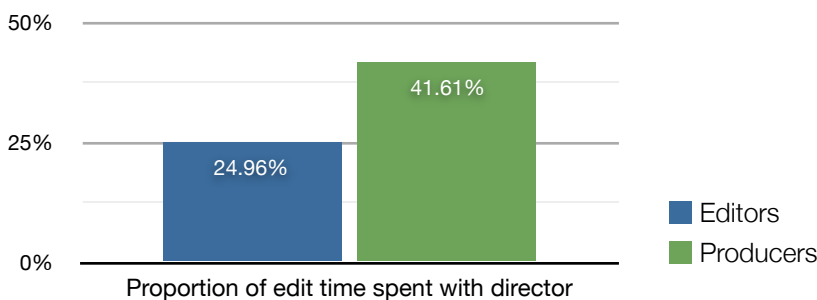
5.3. Assistants

A good assistant editor allows the editor to do their best work, as well as greatly speeding up an edit. Assistant editors are on-the-job learners, and represent an import part of any empowerment strategy. Admittedly, small edit jobs don't require (or can't afford) an assistant. It's great to see that producers hire assistants when the job size demands one, but concerning to see that 40% of editors report never working with an assistant.

Do you have/hire an assistant editor?
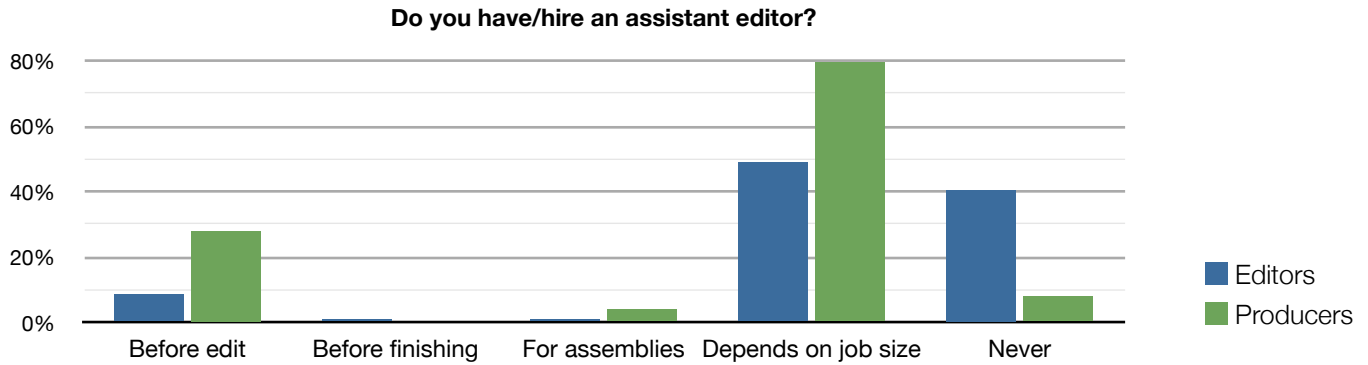
5.4. Post-production coordinators

Producers are split between hiring coordinators when the job size demands one (56%) are never (28%). Editors were split between all four answers, with a (healthy) bias towards depending on the job size (34%)

Do you have/hire a post-production co-ordinator or supervisor?
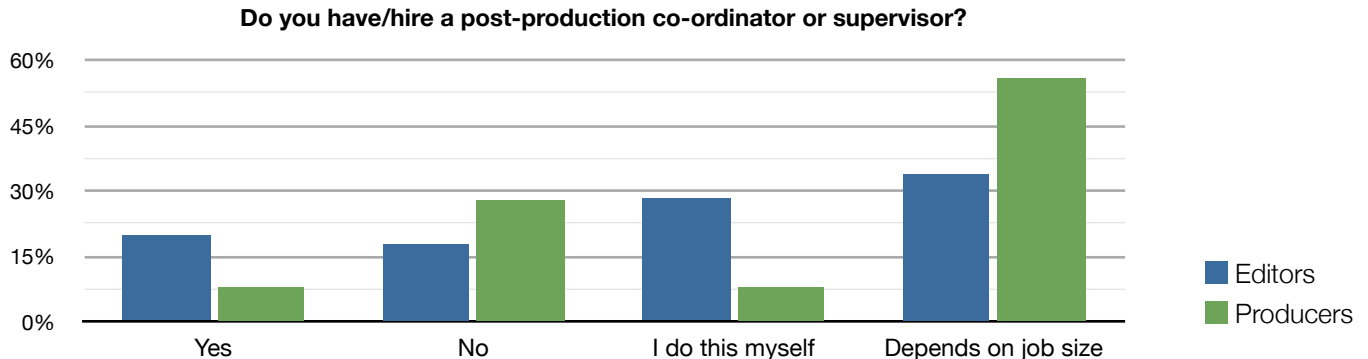
5.5. Technical support

43% of editors reported providing their own technical support, while producers overwhelming reported hiring technical support when the job size demanded one.

Do you have/hire a technical advisor?

6. THE GREATER INDUSTRY

6.1. Editors' royalties

Royalties for creative industries is a hot potato, which we imagine will become more of an issue as the world of motion pictures production continues to fragment. There is a big grey area here: plenty of edit jobs do not contribute creatively in any meaningful way, but plenty of them do.

Nearly three quarters of editors felt their work should be recognised with royalties, while two thirds of producers thought not.

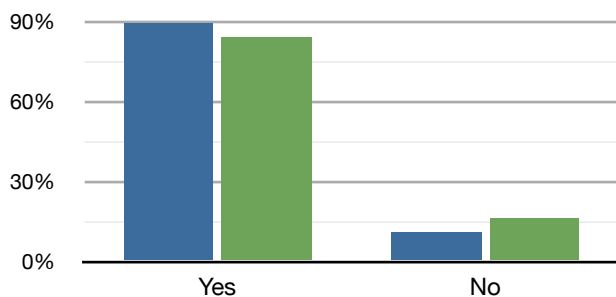**Should editors' creative work be recognised with royalties?**
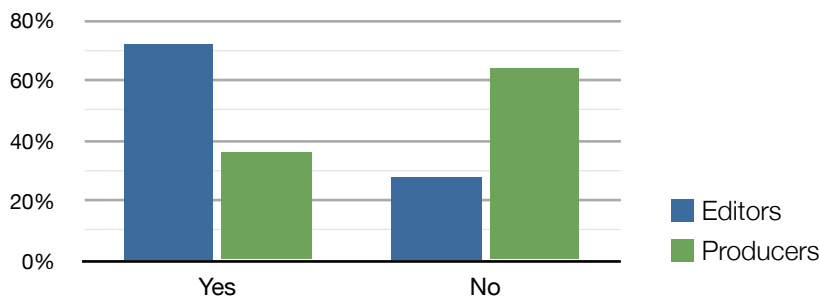
## 6.2. Editors and directors of photography: rates

On the subject of contentious issues, we thought we'd ask about directors of photography. A majority of both editors and producers agreed: DPs earn more than comparably experienced editors. We speculate that this is a result of decreasing cost of post-production equipment: with less risk, producers are in a better position to negotiate, as they can always try out a cheaper or less experienced editor. Doing the same with a key worker on an expensive shoot day can have more disastrous results.

We feel that this pay disparity has gone too far: today, editors are under-recognised creative contributors. It is encouraging to note that producers (64%) and, of course, editors (83%) tend to agree.

Do DPs earn more than comparably experienced editors?   **Do you think this is fair?**
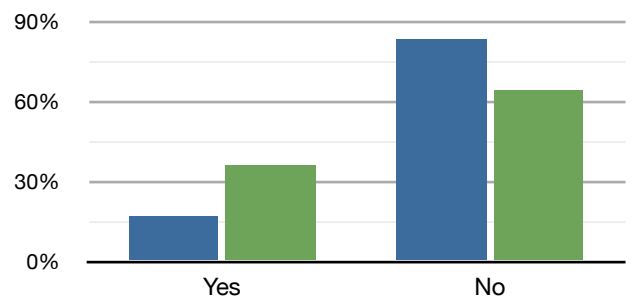

Our 2014 rate card has begun to address this disparity, by comparing editors' standard week of 50-hours with DPs' 72-hour week. Editors are still underpaid when comparing pay, hour for hour. We urge editors to enquire about the DP's hourly rate when negotiating their own rate.
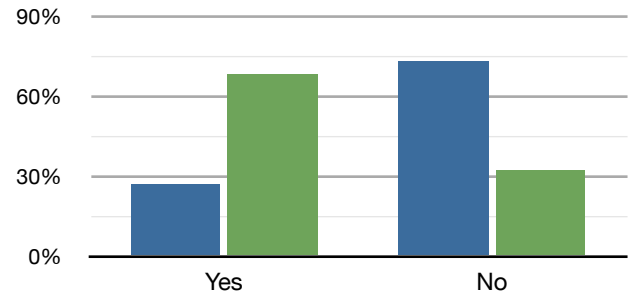
6.3. Editors and producers: rates

Similarly, a probably unsolvable disagreement: do producers earn more than editors? Both groups thought this to be so (editors 89%, producers 60%), but disagreed on the fairness thereof: 73% of editors considered this unfair, 68% of producers considered it fair. We'll watch this over time but want to caution against antagonism; we all need each other.

Do producers earn more than comparably experienced editors?
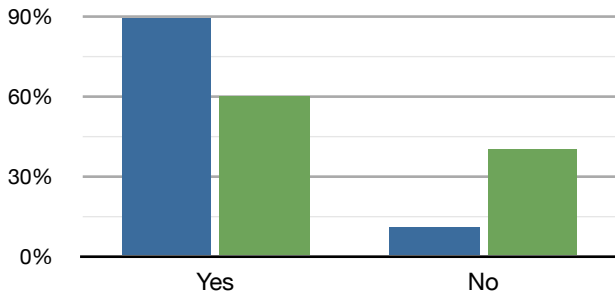
**Do you think this is fair?**

Editors ■ Producers ■

6.4. Editors and producers: transparency

More concerning is editors' reported distrust for producers' transparency, with 53% reporting that producers are not *sufficiently* transparent. Producers were more content with editors, split between a firm "yes" (28%) and "sometimes" (60%).

Do you think producers are sufficiently transparent?
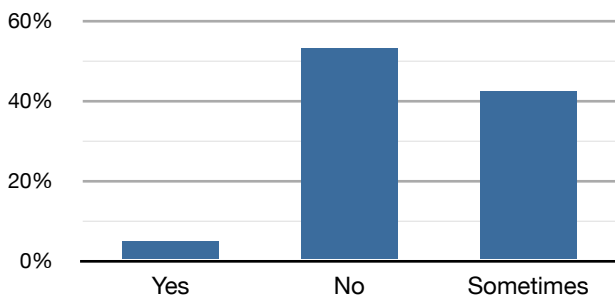
**Do you think editors are sufficiently transparent?**
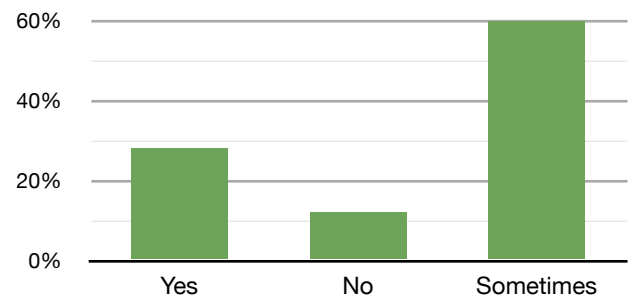
Editors ■ Producers ■

7. SAGE: PERCEPTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

7.1. Advantages of SAGE

Lastly, we thought we'd poll both groups about SAGE itself. Editors saw SAGE as providing employment and respect, while producers thought SAGE less useful, while agreeing on the boost in respect.
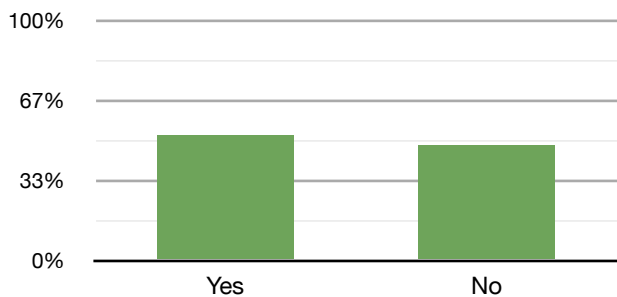
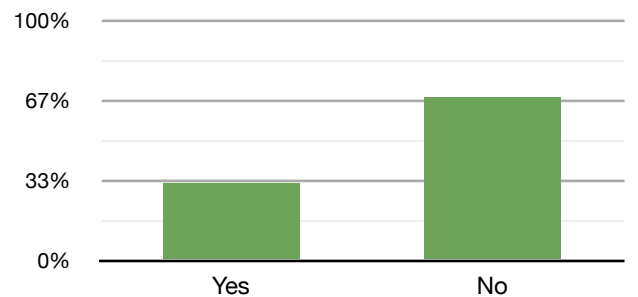**What is the primary advnatage of being a member of SAGE?**
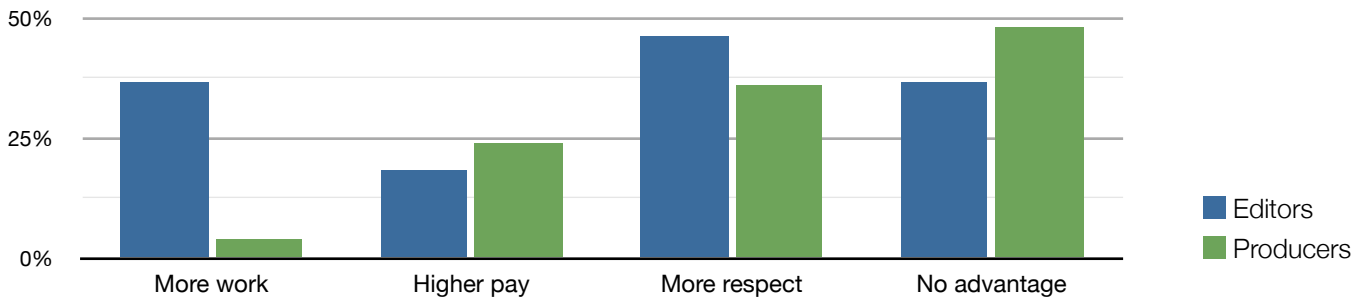
7.2. Producers on SAGE members

Just over half the producers reported a benefit to employing SAGE members, though 68% thought SAGE members were no more transparent than the usual editor.

Is there a benefit to employing SAGE members?

Are SAGE editors more transparent than usual?

7.3. Producers on the SAGE membership list

Benefit or no, producers do tend to like the SAGE membership list, a live, vetted list of our members and their reference-checked abilities.

What is your perception of the SAGE membership list?