

Marine & Diving Crew

This is one of a series of job profiles within the **Film** sector developed by industry experts to help industry newcomers understand the different job roles and the skills required in order to succeed. We aim to keep this information as current as possible and would welcome any comments to help us improve this profile; please email us on: jobprofile@skillset.org. All Job profiles can be downloaded and printed from our website www.skillset.org.

Marine and Diving Crews are mainly responsible for the safety of the cast and crew whilst filming in water. The Head of Department is the Underwater Director of Photography (DoP) or Underwater Camera Operator, whose responsibilities are the same as those of a standard DoP: to interpret the Director's vision for the underwater scenes or sequences in the screenplay, using all the relevant equipment, including lenses, film stocks, etc., lighting techniques and camera movements. As many feature film actors perform their own stunts, characters seen on screen plunging off a cliff into freezing sea water, struggling for air in a sinking sports car, or swimming under ice and eventually coming up for air, may well be played by A-List stars.

Marine and Diving Crews are responsible for creating suspense and drama in such scenes, for bringing the underwater world alive, and for maintaining strict health and safety guidelines in the water. Only a small number of Underwater DoPs work on feature films in the UK, and most have invested in their own underwater cameras; some have invented their own advanced communication systems and specialist equipment. They are employed on commercials, television drama and feature films, and usually work with the same Camera Crew and Safety Divers. Although the work is physically demanding and potentially dangerous, and some foreign travel may be required, involving long periods spent away from base, it is highly rewarding and creative.

What are the jobs?

Most Underwater DoPs are employed in films at the early stages of preproduction, to discuss any water stunts (usually working closely with Visual Effects Supervisors and Stunt Co-ordinators). Because these stunts and effects are often extremely complicated and potentially dangerous, all sequences are carefully planned and storyboarded and used as blueprints during filming. Where a potentially dangerous stunt is required and/or more control of the underwater environment is needed, diving tanks are used. Most Directors appreciate that this is a highly specialised area, and give Underwater DoPs and their crews the autonomy to work alone and, when required, to use their instincts and experience of filming in water to capture unexpected material.

Underwater DoPs sometimes direct the 2nd Unit. They collaborate with specialist 1st Assistant Directors (ADs) or Production Managers who are responsible for operating the vital communication system above and below water, and for making sure that underwater filming runs as smoothly as possible. Unlike a standard camera crew, 1st and 2nd Assistant Camera (ACs) work at a distance from the camera (above the water), pulling focus and checking the camera by remote control. Diving Crews play a vital role in ensuring that all safety procedures are carefully monitored. Diving Supervisors usually stay above water, and are responsible for preparing risk assessments for all underwater sequences. Each actor is allocated their own Safety Diver, who remains close by throughout filming. Underwater Gaffers move and set up all underwater lighting.

Typical career routes

There is no typical career route to becoming an Underwater DoP. Because they must handle a camera and direct action in difficult, sometimes hostile environments, their ability to operate the camera must be

instinctive. Some DoPs start out in junior positions on film crews, or as 2nd Assistant Camera (ACs) on short films or promos. Although progression to DoP can be a long and arduous process, the eventual rewards are great. Safety Divers must have wide ranging diving experience gained over many years of working underwater.

Essential knowledge and skills

Excellent knowledge of underwater safety procedures is a prerequisite to working at any level on a Marine and Diving Crew. Underwater DoPs and their Camera Crew must have a full working knowledge of all specialist camera equipment, lenses, and underwater lighting and diving equipment. Wide knowledge of underwater stunts and special effects is also required.

Key Skills include:

- ability to work creatively without compromising safety;
- good colour and composition skills;
- team leadership skills;
- excellent communication skills;
- physical stamina and strength;
- excellent knowledge of the requirements of the relevant Health and Safety legislation and procedures.

Training and qualifications

The minimum requirement for Underwater DoPs, and for all other members of Marine Diving Crews, is the HSE Commercial Diving Certificate Part 4. Training in stills photography may be helpful for aspiring DoPs. All Underwater DoPs have trained in camera operation, and progressed through the ranks of camera crews, as well as undertaking all the required training for professional diving.

Individual course accreditation in certain subject areas is currently being piloted. As part of Skillset's and the UK Film Council's Film Skills Strategy, *A Bigger Future*, a network of Screen Academies and a Film Business Academy have been approved as centres of excellence in education and training for film. For more information, please log onto the Skillset website.

Where to go for more information

Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the audio visual industries. The first sources of information for all jobs in the industry are the [National Occupational Standards](#). Browse Skillset's website for links to our network of training partners, information about training and access to the comprehensive [Skillset/BFI course database](#). Finally, **Skillset Careers** is the UK's only specialist media careers advice service; for detailed media careers information and advice, visit www.skillset.org/careers.

Websites

- **The British Society of Cinematographers**; www.bscine.com
- **BECTU**, the trade union represents camera personnel; www.bectu.org.uk
- **The Guild of British Camera Technicians** aims to further the professional interests of technicians working with motion picture cameras; www.gbct.org
- **BKSTS** (the moving image society) organises events, courses, and demonstrations of new equipment, and publishes Image Technology; www.bksts.com

Publications

- *Dive Magazine* www.divemagazine.co.uk
- *Sight and Sound* www.bfi.co.uk
- *American Cinematographer* www.theasc.com