Lab to Slate - Call for Participants

Lab to Slate: Unlocking Safe and Responsible AI for the UK's Independent Screen Sector

A new innovation initiative - Lab to Slate - is looking for eight independent filmmakers from across the UK to join a two-year programme. Supported by the BFI, participants will develop a real screen project using emerging ethical and safe AI tools, within a framework providing, mentoring, training, and legal guidance along the way.

Studios and streamers are building AI into how they make work. Independent filmmakers often can't: the tools cost money, the legal and ethical questions are unclear, and the learning curve is steep. Lab to Slate will give you the time, access, and support to find out what these tools can and can't do for your own project, on your own terms.

As this is rooted in safe and ethnical use of AI, which prioritises protecting the ownership of IP, participants will keep full creative control and ownership of their own work throughout. You are not at risk of, handingyour project over to machine learning. Instead, you will test, question, and shape how these tools might serve independent filmmaking, as a co-researcher.

Lab to Slate is funded by the BFI Innovation Challenge Fund, awarding National Lottery Good Cause funding. It is led by Dr Kingsley Marshall at Falmouth University's Screen Technologies centre, with delivery partners Screen Cornwall, Charismatic Studio, and CinePro Lab.

What you get

You will be paid for your time, supported one-to-one, and given access to tools and training at no cost to you.

- **A bursary of £2,500 a year (£5,000 over two years)**
- **A travel bursary** to attend at least one major industry event with a member of the project team, such as Sheffield DocFest, Beyond or the Edinburgh TV Festival. Travel is by rail where possible, applied flexibly where rail isn't accessible for you.
- **A named mentor** from Falmouth University's School of Film & television. This is a film practitioner, who will stay with you for the whole programme. Together you'll agree goals, an AI experimentation plan, and milestones that fit your project and your life.
- **Free training.** Everyone starts with the ScreenSkills-approved CinePro Lab "AI Production Skills" online course, which you can do at your own pace.
- **Access to AI tools** through licences and shared infrastructure, chosen with you and reviewed regularly, so you can experiment without paying for software.
- **Specialist technical mentoring** from Charismatic Studio throughout.
- **Workshops on IP, rights and business affairs**, and guidance on the environmental impact of the tools you use.
- **Quarterly online labs** where the whole cohort meets online for peer feedback, problem-solving and hands-on sessions on your live projects.
- **A route to market.** Finished work and works-in-progress can be put forward to festivals and markets through the Lab, and you'll leave with a development package, proof-of-concept or completed work ready for your next funding or commissioning conversation.

- **An ongoing community.** After the programme you keep access to learning resources, toolkits and the Lab's alumni network.

What we ask of you

- Develop your project using the tools and support on offer, over 24 months.
- Take part in onboarding, regular mentor sessions, and quarterly labs.
- Keep a reflective record of what you tried, what worked and what didn't, including the barriers you encountered. Honest accounts of failure are as valuable as success.
- Take part in a short workflow evaluation with the Falmouth research team, and skills check-ins at the start, middle and end and 12 months and 24 months after the programme is completed.
- Agree to what you learn informing public case studies and an open-access AI Production Playbook for the sector.

The programme is primarily delivered remotely, in order to fit around freelance work, caring responsibilities, and access needs.

Who can apply

You can apply if you are a UK-based independent creative with a screen project in development and a clear need for supported access to emerging technologies.

You should:

- live and work in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland)
- work independently in film, above or below the line: writers, directors, producers, and other creative roles are all welcome
- have a track record of creative practice, at any career stage
- have a scripted or documentary project you are actively developing, or materials you want to package for market
- be working at micro or low budget, or moving from shorts to features

You do not need any experience of AI tools. If you're curious, sceptical, or both, that's a good place to start.

Who we especially want to hear from

We want this cohort to reflect the UK, not just the people already connected to funding. We have set clear targets and will actively work towards them:

- **at least half of places** will go to creatives from groups under-represented in the screen industries, including people who are Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic background; Deaf, disabled or neurodivergent; LGBTQIA+; women and non-binary people; and people from working-class or lower-income backgrounds
- **at least three-quarters of places** will go to creatives based outside London and the South East
- **places are reserved in each of the four nations**, so there will be at least one participant from each of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

We will also favour projects that centre under-represented communities, perspectives and regions, and that tell stories not often seen in mainstream production. This is a scored part of the assessment. If your project draws on communities or experiences beyond your own, your mentor will support you to work with them through consultation and consent.

Access and support

If you need anything to help you apply or take part, tell us. Adjustments are available to the application process as well as the programme itself.

Applying

- This call is available as a screen reader and e-reader compatible document, and in BSL and audio versions on request.
- You can apply in writing or by video. Choose whichever works best for you.
- You can tell us about access needs when you apply, so we can make adjustments to the selection process.
- A free online briefing session will be held during the call. It will be captioned and recorded, and you can use it to ask questions or request adjustments.

Taking part

- If you are selected, we'll have a conversation about your access needs before you start, in the format you prefer (written, phone or video call, with a BSL interpreter if needed). This becomes your individual access plan, held by your mentor and reviewed throughout, because needs can change over two years.
- Online sessions are captioned as standard, with BSL on request, recordings and transcripts, materials sent in advance and structured breaks.
- In-person events are checked in advance against participants' access plans, covering physical access, quiet spaces, communication support, and travel.
- Tools are checked for compatibility with assistive technology. If a tool doesn't work for you, we'll swap it.
- Pastoral check-ins are built into your mentoring. You'll also have clear routes to raise concerns, including an anonymous reporting form, Falmouth University's safeguarding and dignity-at-work procedures, and the independent Film and TV Charity 24/7 Support Line.

The travel bursary does not cover support-worker travel. If you have access costs beyond what the programme provides, please tell us and we will help you look for separate access support funding.

How to apply

Apply in writing or by video through [application link TBC]. Tell us about:

1. **You and your practice.** Your creative background and the kind of work you make. Links to previous work are welcome.
2. **Your project.** What you want to develop through the Lab, and what stage it's at.
3. **Whose story it tells.** The communities, perspectives, and places your project centres, and how they connect to your own lived experience or your ongoing work with those communities.

4. **Why this, why now.** What access to emerging tools and support could make possible for your project, and what currently gets in the way.

Video applications should be no longer than five minutes. They don't need to be polished: a phone recording is fine.

We'll also ask you to fill in an anonymous equality monitoring form. It is kept separate from your application and is not seen by the panel. It helps us check whether the call is reaching the people it should. If some groups are under-represented among applicants, we will do more outreach before the call closes.

How we choose

Applications are scored by a panel convened by Screen Cornwall, drawing on people from a range of backgrounds, regions, and creative roles, including an independent industry representative. Each application is scored against four weighted criteria:

Criterion	What we're looking for
Creative quality	The strength of your practice and your project idea
Representation	How the project centres under-represented communities, perspectives, themes, or regions
Project viability	A project that can move forward meaningfully over 24 months
Need for supported access	How much difference access to tools, training, and mentoring would make to you

Scores are moderated across the panel, and the reason for each decision is recorded. The shortlist is then checked against the cohort targets above, so the final group of 8 is representative. The criteria and process will be published.

Key dates

Stage	Date
Call opens	Wednesday 11th November 2026
Online briefing session (captioned, recorded)	Monday 23rd November, 1.30 - 2.30pm
Call closes	Midday Monday 7th December 2026
Shortlisting and invitation to interview	By Friday 11th December 2026
Interviews	Wednesday 16th December 2026
Decision shared	By Friday 18th December 2026
Onboarding and programme start	Friday 15th January 2027, 9.30 - 12.30
Programme ends	August 2028

Online briefing session

Please join us Monday 23rd, 1.30 - 2.30pm for an online briefing session, to find out more about the opportunity and to ask any questions about the programme and application process. The online session will be captioned and recorded. Please book your place here.

Questions

Contact info@screencornwall.com . You can ask us anything about the programme, check whether you're eligible, or request the call in another format.

Lab to Slate is supported by the BFI, awarding funds from the National Lottery.