

## FILM/TELEVISION CAMERA OPERATOR

### Kaitango Whakaahua Whitiahua/Pouaka Whakaata

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### Description

Film/television camera operators film events or scenes for television, videos or movies.



Camera operator Paul Clark filming on a set

### He Whakamarama



He kaitango whakaahua mo te pouaka whakaata, ripene ataata me nga whitiahua.

### Alternative Titles

- Camera Operator
- Film Camera Operator
- Television Camera Operator
- Video Camera Operator
- Director of Photography
- Cinematographer

### Tasks and Duties

Film/television camera operators:

- study the script
- may interpret how the scenes should look
- select which cameras and equipment are suitable

- may decide on the location of the cameras and lights
- set up the cameras and equipment such as lighting rigs and kits
- work with and follow the instructions of the director
- advise on the best way to shoot or film a scene
- operate the cameras to film or record the action.

Camera operators who film current affairs and documentaries may work independently without direction from a director and operate sound and lighting equipment.



Filming in a city street

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## Personal Requirements

### **Skills**

Film/television camera operators need to have technical skills in order to operate camera equipment. They also need creative ability to advise on the best way to film a scene.



Setting up a camera

### **Knowledge**

Film/television camera operators should know how to operate film and video cameras, and should keep themselves up to date with new filming methods and equipment. They also need to know about exposure,

focus, colour and lighting. It is important that they understand the whole filming process and how the tape will be edited.



***"You have to know a lot about editing. When you shoot something you're shooting it with a view to the way it will be edited, because if it can't be edited easily it's a waste of time."***

**Paul Clark, Camera Operator**

## ***Personal Qualities***

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Film/television camera operators need to be able to work well under pressure, especially when filming for live television. They need to be patient during long periods of filming, and efficient and reliable, as they may be working within time and budget constraints. They also need to have good communication and people skills as they work closely with other members of the film crew.

## ***Physical Requirements***

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Film/television camera operators need to be physically fit and have a strong back and legs, as they stand for extended periods of time and need to carry heavy camera equipment. They also need good hearing and hand-eye co-ordination, and they should have normal colour vision.



***"You need to be as fit as you can be. Filming for long periods and moving your body into awkward positions can put strain on your legs and back."***

**Warren LePine, Film/Television Camera Operator**

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## ***How to Enter the Job***

### ***Secondary Education***

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It is helpful for film/television camera operators to have Sixth Form Certificate. English, maths, photography, physics and art are useful subjects. Some schools offer unit standards in film and television which are also useful.

### ***Tertiary Education***

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A tertiary qualification in television, film or video production is useful.

#### ***Related courses:***



[Media and Broadcasting Skills](#)  
[Media Production \(General\)](#)

#### ***Take off to tertiary!***

[Take off to tertiary!](#) - information and advice to help with study or training decision-making.

### ***New Zealand Qualifications Authority:***



Film and Television  
Performance Production

## ***Entry Requirements***

Film/television camera operators need a driver's licence if they are self-employed or film current affairs.

## ***Useful Experience***

Useful experience for film/television camera operators includes using home video cameras, photography, working backstage in a theatre, working for a production company, film-making and video or television work.



***"It's good to go along to a production company and offer to work. It's surprising how many people are happy to have someone along if they're keen and helpful."***

**Paul Clark, Camera Operator**

## ***Training on the Job***

Skills are gained on the job. Most film/television camera operators start off as camera assistants until they gain experience on the set, and work up to operating the camera.

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## ***Working Conditions***

### ***Work Places and Travel***

Film/television camera operators work in a variety of locations, depending on what they are filming. They may work indoors in television and film studios, or outdoors filming scenes on location. They may travel to a wide range of places both in New Zealand and overseas to film scenes.



Camera operators about to start filming in a studio

## **Equipment**

Equipment a film/television camera operator may use includes:

- film, television or video cameras
- headphones
- cables
- tripods
- monitors
- lights
- other camera-related equipment.

It is useful if they can set up filming equipment such as dolly tracks for the camera to move along.



A television camera

## **Workplace Conditions**

Film/television camera operators work indoors in studios or outdoors in all weather conditions. Their work may be stressful as they need to meet deadlines.



***"You can be filming in all weather conditions, from cold and windy weather at a rugby game, to a hot and humid summer's day at a cricket match, to filming at all hours of the night."***

**Warren LePine, Film/Television Camera Operator**

## **Employment Conditions**

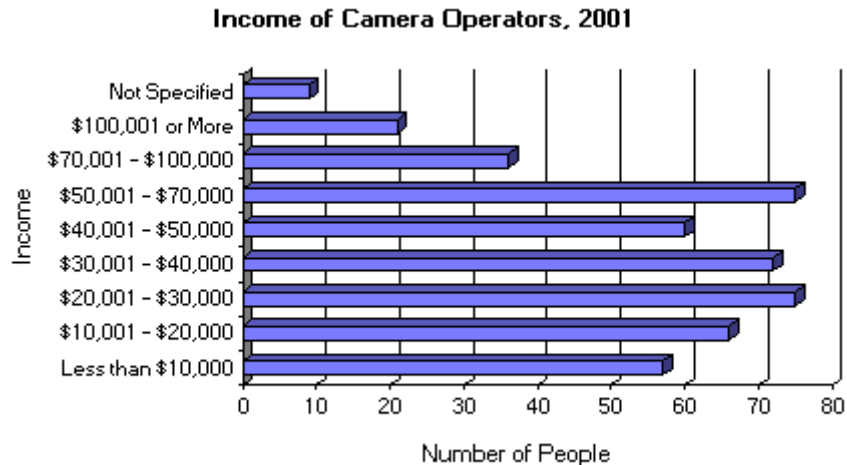
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### **Hours**

The standard shooting day is 10 hours for television and 12 hours for film, although this may vary sometimes. Film/television camera operators may need to work evenings and weekends and be on-call, depending on the programme or film they are working on.

## Salary

Film/television camera operators are usually self-employed freelancers. An experienced camera operator usually earns between \$400 and \$1000 for a 10-hour day, depending on skill, experience and demand. Camera operators who work for a television station usually earn between \$30,000 and \$60,000 per year.



Source: Statistics New Zealand

[Interpreting Charts](#)

## Contact with People

Film/television camera operators work with a variety of people including directors, other camera operators, sound recorders, lighting technicians, filming and production crews, and actors. They may work independently if they film current affairs for a television station.



***"You work very closely with the director. In television they tell you exactly how they want the scene to look, but in film you collaborate and bounce ideas off each other."***

**Warren LePine, Film/Television Camera Operator**

## Job Market

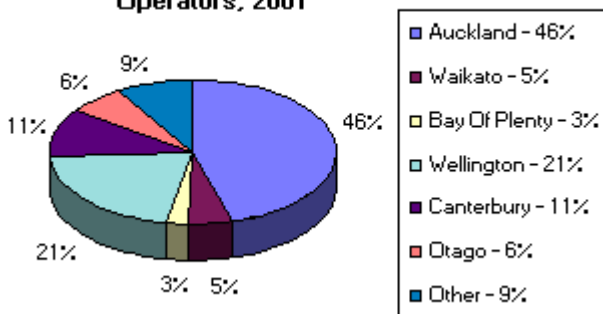
### Market Details

These statements and statistics are based on information available from Statistics New Zealand about camera operator occupations. Charts and statistics on camera operators include data on film/television camera operators.

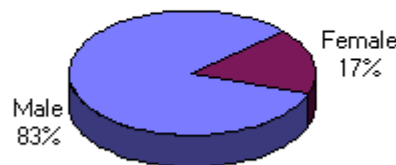
- 471 people were employed as camera operators in 2001
- 82% were employed full-time
- 17% were female
- The highest proportion of people were employed in the Auckland (46%), Wellington (21%) and

Canterbury (11%) regions

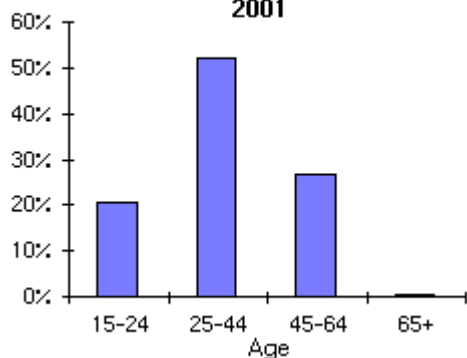
**Regional Location of Camera Operators, 2001**



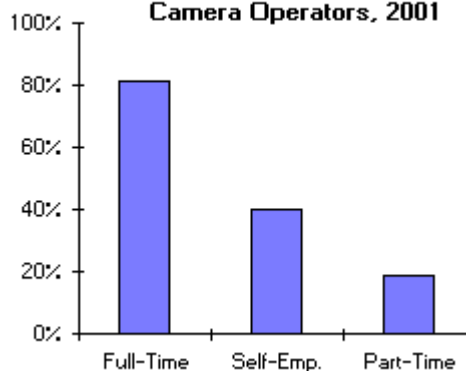
**Gender of Camera Operators, 2001**



**Age of Camera Operators, 2001**



**Type of Employment of Camera Operators, 2001**



Source: Statistics New Zealand

[Interpreting Charts](#)

## Job Outlook

The outlook for camera operators is expected to vary over the next two to three years. For those who are already established the future is good; however, for people wanting to get into camera operation there is a difficult path ahead. This is because of two factors: most camera operators are contractors, and the training is generally believed to be inadequate.

While there are several general television courses providing people with basic skills, camera operators need to have several years of on-the-job experience before they are considered skilled. In the past, the television networks and large production companies employed people straight from courses or completely unskilled, then trained them to a high level. However, this is no longer the case and most camera operators are self-employed freelancers who contract out to projects. This makes it very difficult for new people to break into the job, as production companies are reluctant to employ inexperienced people on contract. This situation has resulted in a small group of highly skilled camera operators getting all the work, and because of this, there is a low turnover.

Since most camera operators are self-employed freelancers, they are reliant on the number of filming projects in New Zealand. This means their employment situation can be insecure. Most specialise in filming for television and video, or film. Project numbers are affected by factors such as the amount of government funding allocated to NZ On Air and the NZ Film Commission, New Zealand's popularity as an international filming destination and the demand for videos.

The main technological changes that could affect camera operators are the improvements being made to hand-held cameras and computer equipment, which makes amateur filming easier and of a better quality. This is most likely to affect the business sector as they may choose to make videos themselves.

(Updated 05/12/2002)

## **Regional Market Details**

Northland / [Auckland](#) / Waikato / Bay of Plenty / Gisborne / Hawke's Bay / Taranaki / Manawatu-Wanganui / [Wellington](#) / Tasman / Nelson / Marlborough / West Coast / [Canterbury](#) / [Otago](#) / Southland

### **Auckland:**

The number of camera operators employed in the Auckland region is expected to grow moderately over the next three to five years. Employment opportunities are growing due to the state of the NZ economy. The economy is allowing international companies to invest time and money in producing films and television programmes in New Zealand and hire local technical staff. There is also a greater demand for locally produced programmes.

Most camera operators work on contract, as production houses do not have a continual need for camera operators and hire them when appropriate, resulting in high turnover. However, while camera operators frequently change employer, few leave the industry. Currently, the majority of camera operators in the region are male, although a growing number of women are entering the industry.

(Written 20/11/2002)

### **Wellington:**

The number of camera operators employed in the Wellington region is expected to remain static over the next three to five years. Factors likely to affect employment opportunities include the number of productions that are filmed in Wellington, government funding, local content quotas, technological developments and the economic situation, which will affect the number of television commercials being made and the budgets available. Many production houses and advertising agencies are moving to Auckland, which may result in more work being produced there. Although, there are more television channels in New Zealand, which could result in more opportunities for programme and commercial production. However, this growth may be offset by an increase in digital production and competition from other forms of advertising, such as the Internet.

The majority of camera operators are self-employed and work on contract for the duration of a production. Turnover among camera operators who work full-time is very low. More women are entering this occupation and these patterns are likely to continue over the next three to five years.

### **Canterbury:**

The number of camera operators employed in the Canterbury region is expected to remain static or grow moderately over the next three to five years. There is potential growth for film production in the South Island, in line with an increase in the number of films being made in New Zealand. However, while film productions in this region are likely to grow, this growth will not be rapid. Camera operators can be employed from other regions, and this limits opportunities for local camera operators.

Government policy on regional television is uncertain. If regional television gains more funding it may



increase the number of television programmes being made in and around the Canterbury region, and create a need for more camera operators.

While entry level positions are generally more accessible for camera operators in regional stations, openings for television camera operators in Canterbury are limited. Turnover among camera operators is low because of high levels of job satisfaction, and because there is the opportunity to meet a wide variety of people. It can take years to master the craft and many camera operators find that the more experience they gain, and the more well known they become, the more opportunities become available. As a result, people who have trained to work as film/television camera operators through on-the-job experience and/or gaining a tertiary qualification, tend to remain working in this field.

Camera operators can work, either full-time, part-time or be self-employed. While the majority of people working for television stations are employed on fixed-term contracts, many film/television camera operators working for production companies are employed on short-term contracts.

### **Otago:**

The number of camera operators employed in the Otago region is expected to remain static or decline moderately over the next three to five years. Despite this, there has been growth in some production businesses that use cameras. An increasing use of graphics and digital cameras is making cameras easier to use, reducing the size of film crews and requiring camera operators to adapt to additional roles. Factors likely to affect employment over the next five years include the number and regularity of productions by local and foreign companies that are filmed in Otago, and the direction that technology takes.

Turnover is low except among young, inexperienced workers who are more likely to be working on a casual basis or leave after training. Because of variability in the work, many workers are employed part-time or on short contracts, unless they are able to perform additional tasks. 90% of the region's camera operators are male. However, the number of female camera operators may grow as more women become involved in the industry.

## **Current Vacancies**



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[KiwiCareers Job Vacancy Links](#)

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## **Personal Profile**

### **Warren LePine**



My interest in film and camera operating started when I was at high school, when the science teacher showed us how the whole photographic process worked. That got my interest going, so I borrowed an 8mm movie camera and started making small home-made films. I won a prize at a local movie club for one of them, and it gave me the encouragement to go further. I was also inspired by a camera operator who worked at the National Film Unit, who impressed me by the fact that he was working as a camera

operator. One of my goals was to work there too, and I eventually got a job there two years after leaving school, for about seven years. I also went to Australia for a year and worked for various production companies filming documentaries, films and commercials. With that experience I didn't find it too difficult to get jobs when I came back to New Zealand.

The thing I like about this job is working as a part of a team and contributing creatively to the filming process. I've always enjoyed my work and I don't think there was ever a time when I didn't look forward to coming to work, as there is always something different to do. Some of it can be quite challenging at times, but it's always rewarding to have been able to work through a challenge and achieve it.

It's a competitive environment these days to be a camera operator, so my advice is to be open-minded and have a good knowledge of the film industry in general, and not to just focus on camera operating. It will give you opportunities in other areas of the industry. Also, don't wait for opportunities to come to you, as you will be more likely to succeed if you go out and get them yourself.

## **Paul Clark**



I watched lots of films when I was a kid, but I think it was Star Wars that got me really excited about the industry. Initially I wanted to be a director, but after I bought a little video camera and started making documentaries about my family I found I really enjoyed the shooting side of it. That's when I got interested in photography and camera work. I did photography at school and after I finished school I did a six-month general TV course. The course included work experience and I got on really well with the people at the production company I went to, so I decided I'd go back during the weekends and help out.

When I finished they took me on as a camera assistant/sound recorder. For the first few years I did a variety of different things; I was a camera assistant, I learned how to do sound, I did a bit of autocue and helped maintain the gear. It was a really good position because I learned about everything. Eventually I became a staff camera operator and I did that for three years, until I decided it was time for a challenge and I went

freelance. Generally the industry is moving that way - there are very few staff camera operators around these days. I was in an excellent position because I had heaps of contacts, good experience and confidence. There is quite a lot of competition, but there's also lots of work if you're good. I love freelancing; it makes it more rewarding when you work really hard and you know you're working for yourself.

It's quite a creative job, especially setting up the lights to get the desired effect. It's also good because you're always working on different projects, with different people. There are so many people with different skills all working together, combining to make this one thing.

I like seeing the finished product, when it's all cut together, seeing if it worked the way I thought it would work. Sometimes you come home and you sit down to watch a programme and a commercial you shot comes on in the break - that's quite rewarding. It's also good getting feedback from other people.

For now I love what I'm doing. In 10 years' time I don't think I'll want to work on the sorts of shows I'm doing now. At the moment I mainly do TV programmes, which are quite fast turnaround; you're trying to shoot a lot in a day and it's often a compromise. Eventually I might focus on drama and commercials, where you have more time to concentrate on what you want to achieve and how you want things set up.

## **Further Information**

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### **Relevant Contacts**

- 
- [Production companies](#)
  - [TV stations](#)
  - [ITVA NZ](#)
  - [NZ Film Commission](#)
  - [NZ Film and Video Technicians' Guild](#)

## ***Related Jobs***

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- [Cinema Projectionist](#)
- [Director \(Film/Television/Video\)](#)
- [Film/Video Editor](#)
- [Lighting Technician](#)
- [Photographer](#)
- [Producer \(Film/Television/Video\)](#)
- [Production Assistant \(Film/Television/Video\)](#)
- [Production Manager \(Film/Television\)](#)
- [Production Runner \(Film/Television/Video\)](#)
- [Radio/Television Sound Operator](#)

## ***Industry Overviews***

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- [Motion Picture, Radio and Television Services](#)



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