

SUBMISSION FROM ANNIE GRIFFIN

For Scottish Government – what it's like trying to be a filmmaker in Scotland

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I am a writer/director/producer, originally from the US. I lived in London for fifteen years, and moved to Scotland in 1997. Having heard about Channel 4's new Nations and Regions office, I thought the time was right to be able to have a career in TV and film and live in Scotland.

Initially, it went well. The Glasgow Film Office helped me find office space for my company Pirate Productions. I hired an office manager, worked on some scripts and got a series commissioned from Channel 4. This was COMING SOON, a three part comedy drama. This led to another series - two seasons/twelve episodes of THE BOOK GROUP, also for Channel 4.

I then made a feature film, FESTIVAL, with producer Chris Young. The new head of BBC Drama, Ben Stephenson, told me he liked my work and I developed a series set in Edinburgh called NEW TOWN, writing eight one hour episodes.

We produced a pilot for NEW TOWN in 2008, and this is where I started to realise that despite the network's public commitment to spending more money in the regions, it was a real disadvantage to be based in Scotland. The Drama commissioners said they loved the pilot, but the new head of BBC1 didn't like it, and there were no slots for one hour dramas on BBC2 or a sufficient budget on BBC4. At this point, as I had the support of the Drama team, I thought BBC Scotland would step in and fight for the project, especially as no large-scale drama had been made in Scotland for some time. Based on the £850k budget of the pilot, the series commission for the additional seven episodes would have been at least five million pounds, all of which would have been spent in Scotland.

I received no support from BBC Scotland whatsoever. In trying to understand why not, my assessment is that the only way people keep their jobs at BBC Scotland is by NOT challenging London. The organisation is largely impotent with respect to network (across the UK) commissioning, and does not have the autonomy to challenge decisions made in London. Specifically, Scottish commissioners are not allowed to meet with Channel Controllers to pitch projects – rather, they have to pitch to London heads – who are themselves developing their own projects, and trust that the London commissioners will represent their projects well to Channel Controllers. When TUTTI FRUTTI was commissioned, this was not the case. Commissioning became very centralised in the 2000s. This has been disastrous for regional commissioning, and now is the worst time ever for Scottish scripted work getting network commissions.

The BBC and Channel 4's strategy to spend more money in the regions has mainly meant transplanting projects from London and shooting them in Scotland. This means we are not getting Scottish talent on screen.

In trying to run a TV and film production company here in Scotland, the worst problem I would identify is lack of network support. Channel 4's support has been quixotic, and I believe the team in Glasgow finds it easier to work with factual based companies rather than scripted. To develop scripted content, you need executives with specific experience there, and C4 has not had any Glasgow based drama or comedy development people.

The other problem is Creative Scotland and Scottish Enterprise's lack of understanding of how to work with our industry. Pirate received support from SE in the 2000s to move our office from Glasgow to Edinburgh and hire a part time Business Affairs person. This was much needed and much appreciated, but happened at time when the company had a slate of commissions. Once things got harder, when we really needed support, the company's turnover had fallen below Scottish Enterprise's threshold for working with us.

It's not difficult to understand that a TV company may have a multi million pound turnover one year, when we're producing a series, and then a fraction of that a year later, when we're developing a script and not in production.

I have no trouble finding work – I directed two seasons of FRESH MEAT in Manchester, and have been offered two series for the BBC, both shooting in London, one after the other, this year. But what seems near impossible is to develop projects in Scotland.

We need a Scottish network that answers to Scottish audiences. We need specialist TV and film support by people who understand the industry.

The best thing to come out of this bottoming out of the industry is the formation of IPS to represent producers' interests. Scottish filmmakers have realised we are in crisis, and we have to work together to find solutions.

We need your support, Scottish Government! Let's make Scotland a film friendly place. This has to start with the indigenous industry. There is so much talent here, and so little of Scotland on our screens. Please work with us! We need you!