

## SUBMISISON FROM BLACK CAMEL PICTURES

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

My name is Arabella Page Croft and I run Black Camel Pictures with my producing & directing partner Kieran Parker. We are responsible for developing and producing the hit film Sunshine on Leith, the successful genre trilogy Outpost, Outpost 2 & Outpost 3 & thriller Legacy. Recently we co-produced our first television drama Castles in the Sky starring Eddie Izzard. I'm currently an Executive Producer on a European co-production Generation Z and in early pre-production with new female comedy Off the Rails that will shoot in Scotland and across Europe. I'm a Board Member of IPS (Independent Producers Scotland).

Five years ago Scotland had Scottish Screen, a dedicated Screen Agency with over 35 staff. The global industry looked to Scottish Screen as a leading agency with it's effective joined up approach to talent development and producers were proud to attend international markets supported by strong executive support.

There was also numerous short-film schemes including the world re-knowned short film programme Tartan Shorts (supported of the BBC), a half hour strand New Found Lands and a low budget feature strand New Found Films (both supported by STV). Further investment was also available to films and incoming productions. Glasgow Film Office (GFO) had a discretionary fund, which was used in a visionary manner to maximise economic and cultural impacts of the industry. They got in amongst the industry, lobbied the agencies and corralled the policy makers. SE's removal of their £1m per annum funding for the GFO was a fatal blow to the sector.

The very process of applying for the aforementioned schemes and going through the process of shortlisting taught me about early development. We learnt how to go about getting scripts commissioned, we began to work with writers, made applications, went through pitching experiences, learned how to budget and how to schedule etc. There was a solid structure for talent development in place.

So what happened to all that?

Creative Scotland amalgamated both Scottish Screen and the Scottish Arts Council and the new agency was tasked with responsibility for the Cultural & Project areas of our sector. Today CS employs only a handful people on the Film Team and they are responsible for our whole sector. New talent programmes are outsourced and there are no low budget feature schemes. CS are erratic in their support and unable to deliver what producers and production companies need in the current climate.

Since the creation of CS, Scottish Enterprise are meant to be responsible for handling the business and industrial company development for film. This simply has not happened and SE have failed to accommodate the market

realities of our film companies and entirely neglected our sector in spite of the significant economic footprint that our productions make to Scotland.

There are almost no indigenous film companies under SE account management and as a result there are barely any film companies surviving in Scotland. Those producers who are still operating are frequently running home-spun operations, are woefully understaffed and certainly are not producing enough films (or television drama) to be considered sustainable.

My own company Black Camel has had the benefit of Creative Scotland 'project' support through single project and multi-project development in the last few years. This has been vital to our survival but it is simply not enough funding and the conditions attached to Creative Scotland investments are still prohibitive and not in line with market realities eg: CS require match finance from the market for single project or multi project investments (the BFI don't) when there is little money available from other sources, CS don't like to be cornerstone funding which producers need from their own agencies and because they are under resourced they ask for sales or distribution in place even when producers are trying to launch new talent. Only last year we had to secure an expensive business loan just to unlock CS funding to keep developing work to enable us to stay afloat. Overhead and producer fees are limited to 10% of development budgets. How are ambitious producers meant to compete with their international counterparts? Is it any wonder that Scottish producers are running companies from their bedrooms?

In spite of this we have a few very good creative producers left who are working full time. They have developed and returned remarkable cultural and commercial success for Scotland in recent years. The feature film adaptation of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* is hotly anticipated in 2015, our musical *Sunshine on Leith* was a major hit, achieving a remarkable £4.7m at the UK box office, *71* is globally acknowledged with BAFTA nominations and festival accolades, *Starred Up* swept the Scottish BAFTAS and premiered in Toronto while *God Help the Girl* premiered in Sundance and was selected for the Berlinale. If this is what our industry can achieve when it's on its knees, imagine what it could do if it were supported.

The film production companies themselves are very weak. CS does not have the remit for business development, and film companies do not tend to qualify for SE high growth support so our companies are falling through the cracks. Scotland will be very lucky to have any indigenous film production companies left in two years.

In their pain, Scottish producers came together to form IPS (Independent Producers Scotland) to try to transform the sector's health. We all backed the important, transformative and visionary business plan for a Shared Services Centre that was submitted to CS for their Regular Funding in June. This proposal (backed by forty producers and their production companies) was sadly rejected by CS. Given the potential cultural and economic returns that a healthy film sector provides, we are still reeling that no money was ring fenced for our sector by CS from their £99m Regular Funding programme.

Since then the IPS board have had numerous crisis meetings with CS and SE to try to sort out this mess but still after hours of our “unpaid” producer time with the staff at both agencies – we remain depressed and disillusioned because both agencies can’t find a way to work together to reform the sector.

It’s therefore no surprise that the film sector is suffering market failure as evidenced in the Film Sector Review with barely five film production companies making regular work. It’s a bleak prospect running a film company in Scotland today and very hard for emerging producers to get their first films made.

We recently tried to attract Generation Z - a Belgian, Spanish, UK co-production to shoot for four weeks in Scotland. The film was helmed by key Scottish talent including director (who we knew well), star and key heads of department and the film would have shot in Glasgow for four weeks. Even though I had been “wooing” the project to come to Scotland for six months we lost the film to Wales because Creative Scotland could not deliver on the finance we needed. My company was publically unsupported by it’s national agency responsible for film and we ended up humiliated in our deal making with a seriously reduced position. We lost a pan European co-production opportunity, ownership stakes in the film, national spend, local employment opportunities, skills and career development opportunities for cast and crew, important international relationships were bruised and a potentially wonderful marketing opportunity for Scotland was lost. Furthermore our company lost it’s much needed production fee. Creative Scotland blamed their remit and guidelines for this blow to my company.

We simply can’t have this happening here any longer. Producers need to trust their agency to deliver when trying to bring in films for co-productions. We need increased numbers of productions in Scotland - both our own original content and co-productions. If we are not producing we are not thriving. The global market is incredibly competitive and now we also have to compete in own country. Scotland has to step up to fast.

We look enviously at our neighbouring countries where their governments hugely value the cultural, social and economic return that film delivers and offer them full support with their own National Screen Agencies. These governments have committed millions to film development and production programmes. Denmark is supported with €65m, Norway €60m, Sweden €43m and Finland €25m. Scotland with it’s £3.5m now has far less than any other nation in the UK (Wales £30m, Northern Ireland £10m and Yorkshire (£15m).

Think of what we could achieve here in Scotland with the support of a dedicated Screen agency, a long-term film strategy, capable experienced staff and some real investment in our company infrastructure and sector. The return to the nation from a number of film and television companies could be spectacular. Scotland’s indigenous producers are the country’s global messengers and our films and dramas are how we project our Scottish culture around the world.

Producers, who drive the projects, need to be much better resourced and the agencies need to be instructed by government. We believe that government intervention is the only way forward - to solve the actual needs of the Scottish industry and to enable the producers to have a chance of catching up with our European counterparts.

We strongly endorse the IPS call for the establishment of a dedicated Screen Agency peopled by experienced, skilled industry personnel. This new Screen Agency should focus on creating a sustainable screen industry in Scotland as a priority. The focus should be on increasing indigenous production, supporting producers as they attempt to win international co-productions to Scotland and stabilising local production companies.

Film has always faced the burden of straddling art and business. It is an incredibly risky venture but the economic returns can be phenomenal when they hit. Most investors tend to invest in projects rather than in film companies and our companies are certainly not investor ready. Investments in projects are normally a combination of gap finance, equity, pre-sales and tax credits. Broadcasters Channel 4/ Film 4 and BBC Films also invest license fees and equity but not as frequently in Scotland as we need.

We also strongly support the IPS call for the Government to identify and implement new funding sources – ERDF like Northern Ireland & Yorkshire Screen and further investigate Financial Transactions (as discussed by IPS with John Swinney). Producer Eddie Dick has also produced a paper on what can be achieved if we “Recycle VAT from cinema tickets and apply to screen industries”. (See IPS paperwork submissions).

The key to a sustainable industry is to empower national producers – it is the producers who initiate projects, attract co-productions and manage the all-important talent relationships. Black Camel remains in a fragile state but with genuine investment and focus on sustainability we would hire qualified development staff, develop more film and television projects and produce and co-produce more regular work. This would enable us to have a chance of more film hits and to make the move into television drama.

Currently few, if any, Scottish indies are producing returnable television drama and this is another key sphere for building sustainable, successful businesses. Our companies are under-resourced and understaffed so we’ve had little financial capacity to move drama into development with London-centric commissioners.

The simplest way of retaining talent and developing our skills base is to increase the levels of production in Scotland. All skills (whether entrepreneurial, business, technical or creative skills) come from creating and working on as many productions as possible.

Black Camel also firmly supports the case for a studio based in Glasgow. This would generate more film activity and serve to attract further attention and investment to Scotland. Moreover a city based studio will encourage a “an indigenous sector hub” which producers would really value and want.

In terms of training I've enjoyed several European producer development training programmes including ACE (Atelier du Cinema Europeen), EAVE (European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs) and Film Business School in Ronda, Spain. These vital programmes help build confidence, skills and networks but ultimately there is no experience like developing and producing your own work.

I advocate a return to a more joined up policy for talent development. Short Film Schemes should be followed by micro-budget First Feature Films (£100k) and these in turn followed by support in low budget features (£300-1m). Film talent need to be nurtured and allowed to make films as they learn their craft – continued experience and practise is so important. Programmes like Microwave in London have been fantastic for channelling new talent.

Scottish Producers are the lifeblood of the Scottish industry. Scottish Government – if you are listening - there are talented producers with enormous potential but we do urgently need the help outlined here. Create a National Screen Agency, peopled by decision makers with experience, an agency that we can be proud of and let's get serious investment into our sector. Only then can we ensure the best Scottish produced films and dramas for the world to see and protect the development of the next generation of Scottish talent.

The Film sector needs Scottish Government's intervention or our production companies will fold and Scotland will lose its remaining film producers.

Thank you.

Arabella Page Croft

Producer, Black Camel

January 2015