

## SUBMISSION FROM LA BELLE ALLEE PRODUCTIONS

### Background

La Belle is an independent film, tv and commercials company working and operating in Scotland for nearly fifteen years. (See [www.labelleallee.com](http://www.labelleallee.com)) Headed by Karen Smythe CEO, they have the unique distinction of having returned the highest percentage of the public money they received for a feature film production ever recorded, with their international feature Valhalla Rising, having to date recouped over 60% of the finance invested in it by Scottish Screen.

Karen is a member of the IPS and she sits on the Board of Creative Skillset Scotland and the Film Skills Board in London.

The following comments are directed exclusively to the operation of the film industry in Scotland and represent the personal viewpoint of Ms Smythe and no others.

### **□ The role of public sector agencies and the effectiveness of the support they**

### **provide.**

#### Introduction

In cinematic terms of repute, not only is Scotland an industry which has punched above its weight given its meager resources, it has an enviable reputation for producing world renowned creative and classic work on extremely low tariffs compared to the rest of the nations and regions. The esteem in which countries like the USA, France and Germany value their indigenous contribution to the global film industry is well known, but not many people know that Scotland has been a hugely successful exporter of screen product, given its size and location. So while it may not be widely appreciated here at home, in the global marketplace where films are traded, screened and given awards, Scottish Films have been praised and lauded for their quality, originality and cultural significance for decades past. From Melbourne to Mauritius, Sundance to San Sebastian, Canada to Cannes, this country has proven it can produce universally recognizable stories of the way we live now, reflecting an abundance of creative talent and proving not only the passion and commitment of our practitioners, but their expertise and ability in a crowded and competitive marketplace. So why does this not impact on our home soil?

### **The role of Creative Scotland and Scottish Enterprise in supporting the indigenous film industry.**

If the films we make are watched, understood and enjoyed by millions abroad, why is it so difficult to persuade the policy makers and investment agencies in

this country of the benefits financial, cultural and creative of supporting such a universally embraced art form? The economic multipliers that international distribution creates causes an extended interest in Scotland through cinema resulting in increased tourist revenues that have a trickle down effect - as the socio-economic classification of people who watch films is ABC1, - they come here with a lot of money to spend... while that's may only be a small and non relevant part of committees area of interest it's yet another example of the potential economic multipliers following on from a vibrant national screen industry. Prior to the absorption of Scottish Screen into Creative Scotland the former agency was a better organized, more productive entity which was alas then vitiated by the merger of the two Arts agencies in Scotland, with the bigger bolder and more top weighted SAC (Scottish Arts Council) taking the best of what the new organization had to offer, in terms of posts and monies, leaving screen to fight for the scraps.

Now a few years down the line the people responsible for moving image and who are entrusted with running this part of the agencies responsibilities appeared not to have the appropriate expertise, knowledge and understanding or even the professional respect of the film making community necessary to service the ambition of the Producers and Companies who made the films which have garnered the international plaudits mentioned above. While recent appointments may signify some change in the offing, the personnel are unrecognized and don't appear to have the appropriate backgrounds in film to justify their positions. How many of the staff working in the film department of Creative Scotland have made an internationally distributed feature film or worked in the industry on a paid professional level they seek to be the voice piece of? We expect our executives to be as skilled or more so than their "clients" which means higher managerial with experience in film production, distribution, marketing or development.

### **Scottish Enterprise.**

For an organization with an annual budget of more than £300million to have never found a way to either

a) support the construction of effective functioning profitable film and TV studio after fifteen years of consulting on it, or

b) identify the unique set up of a Film Production Company (fcp) and find original and lateral ways to engage with them in a meaningful and non condescending way. *(Working Title is an FPC that works identically to those currently in operation in Scotland. No one would dream of dismissing the Producers behind Four Weddings and a Funeral as an unsustainable micro entity just because it employs less than ten people when not in production.)*

Is astonishing and lamentable...

It's a matter of perception and often pre-conception. Scottish Enterprise appear to believe it's perfectly acceptable to help London based Television Production Companies, (as they have done in years gone by) to relocate to Scotland by incentivizing them with hefty grants they spend on winning commissions before sprinting back down the motorway to London just because they fit SE's narrow and unworkable criteria and are shiny sizable entities in one of the few industries where size doesn't matter? Why is SE not judged on results and track record of its support in the creative industries? The only positive outcome of Film in Scotland not fulfilling said criteria of investment and so far failing to secure funding from SE is that it will not be required to account for large sums of money such as were awarded to TV companies incapable of posting a accountable ROI for what they were apportioned over many years. Does Time Warner Cable really need a hand out from SE and would it get one if it asked?

What most of us want to see and feel we'd would most benefit from is a stand alone organization dedicated to serving the needs of and developing the Industry for generations to come. A Scottish Film Institute to champion the best and the brightest of our wealth of talent – to preserve, document and curate the history of our nation on screen and to ensure there are many more ways to tell the stories that fire the imagination and invite people into the world on screen to share the riches found there. I believe that only a bespoke institution with dedicated and qualified personnel can give this country the screen industry it deserves. All countries of similar size to us have one... From Ireland to Iceland, Denmark to Belgium, Film means Business and Culture combined. A marriage made in heaven.

### **Creative Scotland Film Strategy 2014-17**

As the prevailing opinion across the practitioners has been that the current set up and the organization supporting us is not fit for purpose, it was with great interest we awaited the publication of the Creative Scotland Film Strategy 2014-2017. Purporting to remedy previous inattention and make a concerted attack on the apathy and neglect suffered by the sector over the last three years, it appeared instead as a lack lustre and passion-free online brochure full of pretty pictures and sweeping promises but little detail.

The underlying problem with the CS film strategy document was the absence of any strategy, either tangible or results based, concrete or definitive. With no set timetable, delivery dates or named personnel to enact its ethereal ideas of "more of this and better that" it gave us an enthusiastic set of propositions none of which appear to tackle the deep decay at the heart of our sector. We need a lifeboat not a rubber ring...

This is in large part due to the organisations' failure to acknowledge the severity of the crisis within the industry, and its own role in its potential demise due to lack of foresight, proper planning, real commitment to growth, and of course that buzz word, strategy.

From the moment Scottish Screen was dissolved and Creative Scotland absorbed responsibility for film policy into its' monolithic environs, the film production sector has been on life support. It is no coincidence that since CS has become responsible for the development, sustainability, and perhaps even proliferation and prosperity of the moving image, it has become more disjointed, we've made less films, failed to develop the next generation of talent, companies and Producers to an extent to which it's conceivable that when the current generation of Producers retire or throw in the towel, there will be no-one making films in Scotland for the foreseeable future.

Whereas Scottish Screen had qualified and demonstrably effective policies and personnel, and the people and activities it couldn't deliver in house it solicited from a highly effective and international talent pool, nothing in this strategy document displays the same reach, vision or ambition for the industry as its previous incarnation expressed. Nothing I read demonstrated insight, understanding, engagement or real tangible goals. All the promises made are yet to be delivered and we are now into 2015, assuming nothing but more consults and committees; where are the movies?

Another section of the document discusses a forthcoming launch of an **International Strategy Document** but again with no specific dates when we'll see this, or how a such a policy would be enacted, funded, and support indigenous film makers to the spoils is outlined? While craft and technical grades are always delighted to have a new game in town it's the local producers who should be being encouraged by tax breaks to new co-production relationships and partnerships with incoming films. So where's the money coming from to entice Hollywood to Holyrood? Will we see our production fund piggy bank raided, or will some new money miraculously be found? Without substantial investment, total restructuring and bold, clever and brilliant original ideas it seems inevitable the centre cannot hold. These are dark days.

□ **The role of private sector investment in supporting the video games and the**

### **TV and film sectors.**

Please see the IPS response - and while there is unlikely to be any positive response from the private sector to an industry it doesn't understand and cannot image how to invest in, a short term idea could be to hold networking events properly organised around our film events - ie The Glasgow Film Festival and The Edinburgh International Film Festival. We could get down to showing potential investors how the system works in other countries and how good the ROI can be. For example the USA - why it's ok for the likes of David Beckham to make huge investments and how you can make your money back? We'd happily invite the private sector in, but without the public sector getting its act together it seems premature.

**□ How the issues that hinder the growth of creative industries can be overcome**

**and how to capitalise on opportunities.**

See IPS collective response for more detail.

**□ How to retain in Scotland those with the necessary creative skills.**

Not always the best strategy – sometimes you have to let people go away so that they come back better trained and more proficient by working in bigger entities than our population can sustain. The two years I spent working in the USA industry taught me translatable skills that are cross continental. What you need to do is create the conditions to come back to – not always assume that it's wrong to leave in the first place.

**□ How to support those in the TV and film and video games industries to develop business skills.**

Also see IPS plan. The most highly skilled and best trained Producers in Scotland are the ones who took advantage of the international courses on offer at the most appropriate stage of their careers and who went on to create networking and co-production opportunities across Europe and made all the best films here.

ACE (Atelier Cinema European) EAVE (European Audiovisual Enterprise) FBS (Film Business School and Media Business School) within a European context and in the UK and for below the line employees -the courses run by the Production Guild and the National Film and Television School, the European Film School at Ebeltoft etc... They all run internationally recognized courses that fit industry needs. The current provision for training in Scotland is fractured and disjointed, and the institutions which do offer film training at graduate level do not have the depth of experience or longevity required to compete with the bigger and more long serving institutions across Europe and the USA. It's a question of time and seriousness. If Scotland wants to train and educate its own it needs a proper film school not a series of colleges attracting overseas students so it can pay its rent and salaries. That's not the way to run an academic institution. There should be a required minimum of Scottish intake into the current courses offered by a raft of suppliers but actually the whole system could benefit from being amalgamated or shut down. Currently there are too many providers offering the same level of activity none of which has been endorsed by the Industry as appropriate to our needs... ... a total rethink of training and higher education provision is essential if we're to move forward...

There is a below the line training and skills plan being developed by the IPS with Skillset and SDS for CPD and above the line training initiatives – this should be evolved.

**□ Examples of successful international strategies for growing these sectors.**

There are countless examples across Europe of how to create a sustainable sector – see IPS proposal.

I hope you find this submission helpful.

Best Regards

Karen M Smyth

8/1/15