

SUBMISSION FROM LINDY CAMERON, MOVE ON UP

My name is Lindy Cameron, I am a co-director of Cromarty based micro-indie Move on Up, and Executive Producer of the Katie Morag Series' (one and two) for CBeebies.

I am interested in the economic benefit of the television (and film) industry to the Highlands in particular. You will have received submissions from many wise people who will be able to give you an analysis in a much more scholarly manner, so I am just going to tell you some of the Katie Morag story, which I think could be perhaps an interesting case study, as the benefits were contained to a specific area, and thus more perceivable. A snapshot of one project from a small independent TV company. A wee bit of perspective, before I begin, which is that we love our jobs, and consider it a privilege to work in television, tell stories real or imaginary, and document other people's lives with truth and respect.

I think this document addresses this point best:

The role of public sector agencies and the effectiveness of the support they provide.

The Katie Morag Stories were written by Mairi Hedderwick, based on her experience of living on the Hebridean island of Coll.

We had a commission from CBeebies to produce 26 x 15-minute episodes. We wanted to make little dramas with big production values that would appeal not just to children but also to all ages. Family-type viewing of yore!

However our total production budget fell rather short of the amount of funding the channel could offer, so we needed to top it up from somewhere. Very kindly BBC Scotland gave us some funds towards the project, in return for the right to show it on their channel too, and we secured an agreement for investment funding from Creative Scotland, although we had to have a sales agent in place before they would do this, so we approached BBC World Wide who agreed, so that they then had the right to sell the series Internationally, and all of this made the budget more realistic. All investors (i.e.: Creative Scotland and BBC Worldwide) will recoup their initial investment figure, if we go into profit, and they will then also share in any profit the project might make after that, along with other partners or parties that share the "back-end," in a cascading manner. (The recent announcement about the introduction of Government Tax Breaks for Live Action Children's Dramas will very much help projects like ours in future, and help Children's TV Producers to reduce at least some of the amount of time and energy they have in the past had to spend securing additional funds, and indeed the need for sharing of any back-end profits they may or may not make. This alas came too late for our series).

However the unusual thing about our project was the involvement of the Local Enterprise Company in helping our project to be based entirely in the Highlands.

Coll is a very small island, for many reasons we thought it would be very challenging to base the entire 12-week shoot there. One possibility however, and this one was favored by some of the funders/partners, would be shooting the exteriors there, or on another Inner - Hebridean Island, for three weeks, and doing the interiors in a studio near Glasgow for nine. This model of filming is pretty much standard, the assumption being that crews are mostly based in the Central Belt and to bring them up to the Highlands for the entire shoot would involve massive accommodation and transport costs that budgets wouldn't be able to support.

But Move on Up is a Highland company, and this was a very Highland project, so that scenario didn't appeal to us - we wanted to keep the shoot up here, because we knew that the benefit to the area would be legion, and if **we** couldn't do that, with our innately subjective care for the sustainability of area, then who would?

We knew there was a large film studio on Lewis, which had been built with European money for the Gaelic Soap Machair, but which, bafflingly was (and still is!) largely unheard of out-with the Highland area. We felt that if we were to build the set there, and use the various exterior locations that we managed to find around the island, it would mean that we could keep the shoot mostly on Lewis, and completely in the Highlands – just as we had hoped. This, as we saw it, would have so many pluses quite apart from the obvious aesthetic and practical ones: firstly, we would be able to leave a substantial economic benefit behind in the Highlands. Secondly, there was a significant talent base there, and whilst we imported some key Heads of Departments and a small number of other crew -members, we could also give fresh learning/up-skilling opportunities to many other local crew-members and trainees, enhancing the viability of the small but nonetheless significant television industry in the Islands. The reason there were many skilled people around was because of the presence of MG Alba and the Gaelic Channel, and where the crew members we employed hadn't had a great breadth of Drama experience, we luckily had a good number of skilled and generous senior crew members who were happy to share their expertise.

Lewis has an airport, which helped because otherwise it's almost a three-hour ferry journey back to Ullapool on the Highland West Coast, so if anything had gone wrong equipment wise we'd have been able to bring replacements in pdq by plane. We could also fly in key cast members and visiting BBC executives etc.

We had to convince some of our funding partners that filming on the island would work financially and practically, even though transport and accommodation costs would be higher than if we were in the central belt, so I approached our local Enterprise office in Dingwall to see if we could apply for any kind of funding assistance to alleviate the insurmountable strain on the budget, which would then allow us to get the backing to film in Lewis, as opposed to the depressing Central Belt scenario.

Because we are a Ross and Cromarty based company, our local office, together with the Western Isles office of Highlands and Islands Enterprise,

eventually (because it was a most unusual request for them and didn't automatically fit into any of the "round holes") were able to invest into our company, directly channeled to the Katie Morag Project. The HIE funding amounted to the rough equivalent of 5% of the budget.

This was enough to persuade any doubters that we could film on the island and production began in the spring of 2013 for a 12-week shoot. We built the sets for the interior of the Post Office, Grannie Island's house and Katie Morag's bedroom in the studio. We found and rented suitable exterior locations for the significant places in the books scattered all around the island. We sourced (buying and renting) as many props and items of furniture locally as we could.

Everything we could we kept in the Highlands, all of the postproduction (editing, grading, dubbing) was to be done between Cromarty and Stornoway. Lewis is a big island, with a great support network for a shoot, so we lacked for nothing, and we encountered nothing but support, kindness and encouragement from the Leosaich. We had a great shoot and the series has been very well received and in fact has won several awards much to our amazement.

Early in 2014 we were commissioned to make series two, which we are just completing and which begins to air in February.

Our (Lewis based!) production accountant has appraised the Highland spend of Series One as follows:

62% of the budget was left behind in the region i.e.: used and consumed in the Highlands and Islands, so the HIE investment has increased by more than tenfold. Of the total approx 98% was spent in Scotland.

Of a 26-part series budget this is a significant amount of money. This figure does not include any multipliers – that is to say, looking at where that money was spent on the island, by our employees (we had a daily cast and crew of anything between 70 and 100 depending on what scenes we were filming.) All these hungry mouths were fed by a local caterer, for 12 weeks last summer, and 9 weeks this summer. And then there were the crews and cast members socialising on the island, imported crew taking boat trips etc, bringing family up, spending money on petrol, food, drinks etc. And a lot of their wages were being spent in the Island for the entire duration of the shoot. The 2012 BFI Economic Impact report (1) gives a good analysis of what the multipliers are estimated to be.

Another plus point was clearly the fresh opportunities and challenges to local people, who we either trained or up- or re-skilled on the job. A good number of our actors and almost all of our extras came from the Islands too. All these skills remain for any future productions coming to the island. Some of them have also headed temporarily to the Central Belt to take up freelance contracts on other productions.

Another benefit is showcasing the Highlands. Currently BBC Worldwide have shown Katie Morag Series one on their CBeebies channel not only in the UK but to places as diverse as Mexico (dubbed into Spanish!) Ghana, Australia, and South Africa, and they have sold it to Sweden, who are also going to dub it into Swedish. (Incidentally the Gaelic Channel BBC Alba translated the series into Gaelic, employing a team of Gaelic writers, and aired it on their channel too.) (Incidentally, we won't see any benefit financially from any sales for a long time if ever, because there is a large sum of money to pay back first, but we are happy that the series is being shown around the world, it will hopefully benefit Mairi Hedderwick's book sales abroad too.)

Which neatly leads on to the tourism spin-offs, and we have had various meetings and tried to suggest to the different Island tourist agencies that they collaborate with each other to encouraging and spread any potential benefit widely, so that any Katie Morag "*toddler tourism*" might be felt across all of the Hebrides, not just Lewis or any one island, because something of the magnificent and rich world of Katie Morag can be found on each of the Islands. When we have time after the delivery of series two we'll try and continue to help this to move forward. By the way, during first series shoot we sent a small unit to Coll itself to film some of the island's beautiful scenery and iconic images , so that in each episode there is, and will always be, an essence of the island where it all began.

There is also a small amount of merchandising potential. For example the skirt that Katie Morag wears was made for us locally on the island, using tweed that was designed and woven for us by one of the local mills, and they will have the exclusive right to market that with the Katie Morag trademark.

If we hadn't filmed up here, all the aforementioned benefit would have been considerably diluted, so we're delighted with the outcome. We hope it's interesting to see how one small production can create so many ripples.

So what would help us in future? Scotland could do with an Incentive Fund, other countries have them, and we believe that perhaps an official Highland and Islands Film Fund might be a neat and effective way of helping productions up here, either indigenous or imported, because as we have shown its benefits are far-reaching, ticking many evaluation boxes. It could be from some public agency like HIE or other and could be matched with a Philanthropic donation and it wouldn't need to be very large, but it would be a fantastic wee inducement to other Producers when looking to shoot a script set in the Highlands and Islands, and who may want to use the Studio (now managed by the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar).

Many times a producer will need to prove to potential investors or funders, that they can bring other funding to the table, which can be tricky if everyone is requesting this, it's almost like no-one will blink, and step in first. So to have access to even a small amount of funding, from such an organisation that will come to the table first, and pledge funds with no conditions, would be a great thing.

Some of the business advice on offer from the Enterprise companies is perhaps not suited to the vagaries of our particular industry and more targeted, industry specific help from them would be best.

We would also like to discourage the use and dependence on dreaded Consultants to do annoying surveys (because they call you up usually when you are uber busy and ask hundreds of questions it seems you've answered before, or worse - don't call you up at all!) Then write costly reports that are generally out of date or off the mark, and instead invite submissions like you are doing here, and encourage continual open dialogue with industry practitioners.

This isn't an easy industry to be involved in. It's its own unique business model. It's not totally an art form so doesn't sit easily in Creative Scotland's general funding models. Creative Scotland in the main invest, or give loans to Film and TV projects, as opposed to grants, with the other art forms they are not required to pay the funds back. Granted there are not many TV or Film Projects that go into profit, thus triggering the repayment, but it's a key difference and I feel it's a significant one. (I think it is generally accepted now that the amalgamation of SAC and Scottish Screen wasn't ever going to be a good idea.) Neither is it an industry in which it's easy to amass large profits (unless you were to rob all last vestiges of production values from the programmes. And alas it has been known to happen.)

In TV profit is production fee and production fee is generally reinvested into R&D. So it's pretty much hand-to-mouth for the smaller Indies. For every ten ideas you develop you may get one off the ground on best average. And actually there are not so many outlets for our programmes here any more. Current Television vogue is for long running formatted series' made by the super-indies. BBC Scotland are doing rather more in-house than before it feels, and very little drama, STV have no realistic money for programmes, so you have to bring finance to the table yourselves too. So you have to look further afield to the digital channels more and more. All do-able, but time-consuming, and scary, when you are a small company with no core income to sustain you.

Commissioning Editors move around the Channels, and any relationship you have built up will be lost when they move on. And truthfully not many of them want to take risks or trust their instincts any more, because they are being scrutinised too. They favour the tried and tested giant, usually amalgamated, companies from the South.

The recent Film Summit, part of last year's Edinburgh Film Festival was really energising, as it felt that practitioners from across all sectors of the industry could come together, fostering a spirit of co-operation and care in the industry that I haven't personally seen in Scotland since the days (back in the 80's) when the Scottish Branch of our trade union (ACTT as it was then) was a de facto support group/platform for producers and technicians alike.

It would be great to feel that Creative Scotland or some specifically over-reaching maternal body were able to give the Indies and Practitioners, some

kind of business and moral support or to enable an open and accountable group to fulfil that role, at the moment that isn't part of CS's remit. I do feel the last few years have been difficult for those working there, as they have been victims of an unfortunate system in the first place. And likewise it has been frustrating for the producers who clamour for help and change.

Also we worry about the freelance technicians within the industry. Quite a lot of us aren't innate business people, but we have some amazingly talented people in our midst, but more and more their skills are being eroded by cheaply produced formulaic television, it's cheaper to get a recent graduate researcher to go and shoot an interview and grab a few GVs (general views) than it is to employ an experienced Lighting Camera person (heaven forefend that they have an assistant) and gear, as long as you're not concerned that it looks ropery and sounds inaudible. So these long serving Freelance Craft based Technicians are really really struggling to keep afloat (emotionally as well as financially) we worry very much about them.

Tackling much of this is clearly beyond the scope of this inquiry, but it builds a small picture of part of our fractured industry I hope. And the story of the Katie Morag series might help to show the benefit of supporting our industry I also hope.

And if you can help us to build a more sustainable industry and a supportive framework it would help to alleviate the relentless hand-to-mouth existence for our Scottish producers and technicians alike.

Lindy Cameron

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