

SUBMISSION FROM MARIE SCHMIDT, NEW DANISH SCREEN

Dear Committee,

Firstly, please allow me to thank you for the opportunity to respond to your call for evidence. I find it to be a welcome initiative. Apologies anyhow for the brevity of my comment, and lack of specifics I had otherwise planned to provide in order to make my argument clearer and hence pave the way for more constructive dialogue and, more importantly, for real work to commence. I hope, however, I will be able to make further comments at a later date, and would appreciate the opportunity to do so, even if in person.

Media as in Film & TV, games and screen education hardly features in the White Paper, so I hope your interest is a sign that the Scottish Government and all members of Parliament will up the sector's stake and further see it as a cultural carrier, informing, entertaining and educating the current or new, even devolved nation. We can get entertainment and cultural produce from anywhere, so why not make sure more Scottish content is made and made available.

Let me briefly introduce myself. After completing my Masters in Media Culture in Glasgow, I stayed put and worked as a Film & TV practitioner. Starting my career doing R&D for the Research Centre (a feasibility study into whether Scotland should model itself on Denmark and get its own National Film School), I since worked my way up to produce but also became co-founding director of the independent production company Autonomi Ltd and the bygone training outfit Diversity Films CIC. Failing to secure enough funds for film projects and talent nurturing alike, and therefore to make ends meet, I moved to Denmark in Nov 2012 to take up a post as Commissioning Editor at the Danish Film Institute (DFI). Here I work within the professional talent development scheme New Danish Screen (NDS), which supports all formats (feature films, shorts, documentaries, transmedia, TV-series pilots, etc) by emerging directors and strong creative teams. We complete between 12-20 films a year, and run labs, training programmes, talent dates, etc, on top of substantial development processes and commissioning. NDS have an annual budget of 32m DKK (est 4m€) to spend, and we are part 'owned' by the two main broadcasters (DR and TV 2), who also contributes to half our budget, i.e. 8m DKK (+€1m) each per annum.

Having already wrestled substantially with the restructuring of Scottish Screen as it amalgamated into Creative Scotland, I still observe developments from afar. It has been a very long journey, and it still seems unclear to me when and where it will end, and, say, who all the well-intended, yet blurry and status quo signaling Film Strategy measures are going to benefit. Staying on the Strategy, also it is difficult to see how it will be implemented, and with whom Creative Scotland is actually going to deliver. Bar a few semi-visionary improvements the Film strategy calls for more of the same, and without more funds secured to go round, maybe that is understandable. Regardless, one survey, review and strategy has followed the other since early/ mid 2010, and it has left the industry in tatters. The fittest, most affluent or trusted companies/ organisations/ educational institutions (academies & universities) have survived, and I don't believe that is a strong position to seek out and grow new talent, nor nurturing established practitioners or a vibrant film culture from.

I have sat at umpteen roundtables, fed into at least two reviews conducted by CS (The Film Review and, latest, the draft film strategy) but never in person. Despite being an award-winning outfit, we were not invited to present on the initial survey. Furthermore, I have offered up my view in May 2014 where I gave a presentation comparing my experience of working in Scotland v DK at a conference in Edinburgh. It formed part of a study undertaken by Glasgow University entitled "Shaping Scotland's talent – change, flexibility and new pathways in Scotland's screen industries". It included vital inputs from across the spectrum (universities, C4, film schemes, Skillset, mavericks, etc). Some of the content can be found on this online resource: <http://shapingScotlandStalent.co.uk/>

I know Scotland is not Denmark, but, for starters, it does share a demographic makeup and cultural values, including ideals of maintaining the welfare state to some extent. Please bare that in mind when going over below comments on the specific points you've asked for views on. As said, the lack of detail is obvious.

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

Public sector agencies and their support are essential to a thriving creative industry that by default cannot be solely guided by market forces. In the case of public film funding in Scotland, I think a clear legislation (as in a Film Law), must be put into place, closely followed by a willingness to rethink and revamp the current system to some degree. To mature and find impact, sustained funding as well as a longterm strategy (covering all aspects of education, talent training and content development, production, marketing and distribution) must be provided.

The role of private sector investment in supporting the video games and the TV and film sectors.

Market forces alone will not foster the creative pool of thriving talent that growth of the sector necessitates. The commercial end of the scale surely will and does benefit from private investment, even at seed level, and the model here should be honed. Also it should act as inspiration for foundations and companies to take chances on more culturally heavy-weighting content, and help support talented visionaries at their early career stages.

Although still not near enough if you ask the games sector in Denmark, DFI have just decided to more than double their annual (public) spend on games (developing for market). I believe the move is primarily driven by an acknowledgement that some of the most educationally significant or culturally poignant projects, have little or no commercial value, and especially not at their conceptual stage.

How the issues that hinder the growth of creative industries can be overcome and how to capitalise on opportunities.

Barriers are plenty, but here I'll stay on two.

A film studio will not solve it all, if anything, if there is not a significant push to tweak at an infrastructural level to prepare, upkeep and retain the talent mass required to serve it at the standards expected. The history of brass-plating it is well-kent, and maybe the much needed boost to the infrastructure the lobby promises a studio will bring, will be a far cry

from reality when all but admin staff and a few B-crew are the only ones not jetted in to deliver top dollar?

I was for one, initially, extremely delighted when London companies moved up to Scotland, but Scottish Enterprise, the broadcasters and national film agency (Scottish Screen) have ploughed millions of pounds into companies that are registered and pay corp tax elsewhere, and are not shy of still flying in all vital creative forces for their productions, or, going elsewhere to spend the dosh. Are control measures significant?

Broadcasters in Scotland are freewheeling. The indie sector has not benefited from quotas either, which C4 has never delivered on, and the BBC not been challenged on despite reaching their proportional target (per capita est 11%). Their handling of the WOCC is to this day a massive opportunity for their in-house staff and the super-indies only. Indigenous Scottish indies are left with small beer, mini-series or nothing.

I believe The Scottish Government can make a sea change by regulating spend further and redirect it to where the mouths are. The individuals being consulted are power houses, and are, if only tokenistic, not interested in the feeder level (micro companies, alt training initiatives, mentoring etc).

The case has been made many a time for a Scottish TV channel, which could prove a significant boost to the independent sector – and to Scottish culture. Prop up the public funds by partnerships independent of government, C4, BBC and STV, but without them dictating as is the case now.

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

A lot of substantial talent work outside Scotland, not out of choice but necessity. Only by boosting the independent sector – via both financial but also legislative measures - can this change.

Learning by doing is essential in having a thriving film culture, but the focus in Scotland seems to be on further institutionalizing and intellectualizing the talent force rather than offering it the alternative paths a healthy sector can provide. I see a substantial increase in core funding, earmarked for the independent Scottish production sector, and not to the TV stations or academies as is the case now, as vital.

The best mentors are often not in a position to offer up placements due to loss of time and hence earning.

How to support those in the TV and film and video games industries to develop business skills. n/a for now

Examples of successful international strategies for growing these sectors.

Denmark has a pretty effective system in place, guided by a Film Law and a film accord that is negotiated by government every four years. It's not flawless, but is backed by all political parties, who signs over est 2 mia DKK (est £200m) every four year to handle both economic as well as cultural aspects of film. www.dfi.dk

Ref New Danish Screen model above – how a mixture of government, PSB and commercial broadcasters foot the bill and together invest in talent development, - without editorial interest.

Canada, Brazil, Belgium and France, a.o., tax telecoms etc, which is an instant massive revenue going directly into creative sector. A recent report from the Canadian Media Fund gives a good overview on new and future measures.

A few closing remarks (originally made when commenting on the draft Film Strategy)

The Scandinavian model ensures commissioners/ decision makers are replaced after two, four or max five years? Although it can be frustrating being employed this way (I am), it gives fantastic freedom, and now working closely with a constant flow of creatives, I understand and totally appreciate why it is done. I might see the possibilities and trust in talent others would reject.

'A shared sense of excellence' - a phrase featuring a lot in the review - what does it mean? Who defines what it is, and are films best made by committee, via this shared idea of what excels? If it is Scotland sharing, it could be clearer.

I do not believe handing money to established partners and institutions, such as SDI, Screen Academy, Royal Conservatoire, or DigiCult for instance, is the way forward, even if for new initiatives. In my view, too many professional interests are at stake for the individual execs in question, and the educational institutions lack the time, focus and proper vision to drive new initiatives and foster substantial creative talent.

Documentaries are to be worked on with CS partners (the Strategy says). If partners are only SDI, I don't believe they singlehandedly hold the key to even paths for Scottish talent to thrive within the documentary field. See comments above.

Define 'experimentation'. If not related to risk maybe it should be.

This will have to do for now. Please do not hesitate to get in touch should you require any further thoughts or detail.

Best regards,



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