Submission from Alan de Pellette, Filmmaker

Dear Committee,

I am an independent filmmaker mainly engaged in trying to make feature films, whilst also working as a freelance director in television and ads. I’ve made 5 short films which have screened in festivals and on TV around the world and I've worked in broadcasting for over 20 years as a director, writer or producer. I am also an elected member of the BAFTA Scotland committee, which promotes all forms of screen industry excellence in Scotland.

Thanks for inviting written submissions to your inquiry – here are my suggestions, some of which echo the thoughts already expressed by colleagues within the industry.

Make Better Use Of Public Funding

With existing lottery funds, I would like to see a significant development and seed fund which could still be administered by Creative Scotland support staff BUT is editorially managed by a rotating group of Scottish-based creatives who care about the growth of the industry as much as their own success. This fund would be used to give writers, creators, producers and directors some income and space to take risks and get projects off the ground. I have two experiences to cite for why I think this could work.

I worked for many years in one of the most successful departments of the BBC – comedy and entertainment in London – which during the 90's and 00's gave early breaks to the creators of and talent behind many innovative or successful productions that have gone on to win major awards and export around the world. These include Have I Got News For You, QI, Graham Norton Show, Peep Show, The League Of Gentlemen, The Mighty Boosh, Shaun Of The Dead and In The Loop to name a few. In this department, filled with ambitious and creatively bold writers, directors and producers, we had a meeting once a month to decide where seed and development funding would be spent, in which the panel rotated and every creative in the department took their turn at evaluating projects. There was plenty of heated discussion but no pettiness, jealousy and rarely a bad decision as everyone contributed with passion, conviction and in an environment of total equality with their colleagues. It created not only a supportive and exciting atmosphere, but it confidently fostered the best ideas and developed many of the greatest talents and shows/films we see today.

Secondly, I have spent the last 5 years either chairing or participating in juries for both the BAFTA Scotland and BAFTA Scotland New Talent Awards, where many of the highest ranking practitioners in our industry freely give their time, energy and considerable knowledge to debate the merits of all kinds of screen content before agreeing on winners and nominees. In my experience, people driven by making quality work are always excited to see others doing the same – it inspires us, helps us raise our game and makes us feel like we could all be part of something ambitious and successful.

Broadcasters & Other Partners

In a small country like Scotland where all screen activity is inextricably linked, broadcasters have a vital role to play, however, we have to engage and challenge them to create and ambitious and long-term plan for major original programming with an initial 5-10 year commitment.

In my own field of interest, longer form drama, it would be the easiest thing in the world for Creative Scotland, any of the other government development funds, a private investor with
an interest in supporting talent promotion and entrepreneurial risk (Sir Tom Hunter for example) and the BBC, Channel 4 or STV to club together and create a new annual Play For Today style strand, where at least a dozen new single dramas are commissioned every year at modest budgets. Not all will work, but some will grow into bigger entities that can sell internationally and raise the quality bar in Scotland.

There are so many writers, directors and producers in their 30's and 40's, many with years of experience within the film and television industries, who are still struggling to make the requisite progress and get a body of credits behind them. The main reason for this is that they have spent up to 10 years trying to find a way of scraping together a few shorts, getting them seen in an increasingly congested market, while trying to convince a myriad of apathetic, risk averse or disenfranchised development executives and commissioning editors that 'they can be trusted'! Trusted to work with crews and actors (almost always on their wavelength) and produce, at the very least, a competent piece of work for which they have trained, made sacrifices and prepared themselves thoroughly for year after year. That's before we get on to the younger talent in their 20's who have either studied, taught themselves or have brilliant visionary ideas waiting for their opportunity.

Size Does Matter

Quantity and quality go hand in hand. If you open a nice bar on a street, no matter how good it is, you have to work really hard to get people to come in or you might be lucky that some people discover you. If you have a street with lots of bars, even if some are of lesser quality to certain customers, you now have a scene where people congregate, curiously check out the entertainment on offer and enjoy themselves. Surely we can spend our money and initiative better to enable lots more screen content in its various forms to get made and then get seen.

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