SUBMISSION FROM BEN OWENS, SCENIC ARTIST

My name is Ben Owens and I am a film and television technician and 11 year member of I.A.T.S.E Motion Picture Technicians Union Local 891 in Vancouver, BC. I grew up in Scotland and I trained at the R.S.A.M.D (now R.C.S).

Over the past 19 years I have lived and worked in Canada, both in Vancouver B.C and Montreal Quebec, but in June 2014 I moved back to Scotland. While in Canada, I have worked on more than 26 film and television productions in Vancouver, BC. 14 of these productions were large scale feature films including Fantastic Four: Rise of The Silver Surfer (Fox), Twilight: New Moon, and in 2013/2014, Tomorrowland (Disney), Night At The Museum: Secret of the Tomb (Fox). I have also worked on smaller feature films such as Big Eyes (2014) and TV series.

Most of my insights into the film sector are from an art department perspective as I have been employed in the role of scenic painter, scenic artist, paint foreman, head painter and set sculptor. I have worked in both pre-production as well as with the main production crew as a standby scenic painter. I am also active in my Film union, I was an I.A.T.S.E Local 891 delegate (representing LGBT film technicians) at the CLC Labour Conference in Montreal in May 2014.

Please see my submission below.

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

-I am not familiar with how the public sector agencies function in Scotland but I have two comments.

-There is a valuable service which is missing from the Scottish film sector, which is provided by the BC Film Commission and the Ontario Film Commission (and has been for more than 20 years).

Without this service it is much more challenging to network and find employment in Scotland. The service that the BC Film Commission and the Ontario Film Commission is a publicly available and regularly updated 'Film List' which is featured on their websites. This film list details all of the productions (Film & TV) currently filming in the province with the shooting dates and contact details of the production office, email, telephone etc. It would be relatively easy and inexpensive to make this happen in Scotland.

-It is counter productive for local authorities to give any location to a film company for free, (even if it is a low budget production) this has long term negative side effects and does not bring film employment to Scotland. I am not suggesting charging money for every location, I am suggesting negotiating job positions. For example, we (City of Glasgow) give you (film production) George Square for free, if you hire 25% or even 50% 'local hire' when filming in Scotland, and not just jobs for runners, P.A's, security guards and cleaners! We must secure jobs for film technicians in all departments. It is a disgrace that there are mostly all London or international crews imported to work on location sets in Scotland on big budget films. Glasgow lost out big time on an opportunity when it gave World War Z George Square for free as a film location. If the USA imported all their crew to Canada, there would be no Hollywood North in Vancouver.
The role of private sector investment in supporting the video games and the TV and film sectors.

- There needs to be more encouragement of producer investment from the philanthropy sector. There also needs to be encouragement to expand a home grown 'Producer Class'.

- One might think that paint and construction materials for sets can be procured anywhere, however, this is not the case. One of the problems hindering the Scottish and N. Irish film industry is that specialist scenic paints and other film specific products are not readily available at local suppliers.

Regarding scenic paint (and other specialist paints and varnishes used in film), one can wait days for a delivery from London which can halt production and cost time and money or disrupt the set build. In Vancouver, Coast Paints started to manufacture high quality specialist scenic paint more than 20 years ago and so there is only a 20 min wait time for a delivery, this is now taken for granted but they used to have to import it from the USA or Ontario. It would be great if there was a scenic paint manufacturer in Scotland, because we could supply the North of the U.K. This would also be a benefit to the Theatre Industry as well.

Again, one can wait days for delivery of sculpture supplies. Having ready access to sculpting materials is also going to make the film business easier and faster, and will also benefit the sculptor population and the Theatre Industry. Montreal has an excellent store which supplies the Film Industry. It is called Sial.  


- Because many film studios / workshops are former warehouses or big empty buildings, there is rarely much thought about air extraction of fumes and dust or paint spray booths, so, having a company which rents out portable spray booths and large extraction fans to film productions would be a good investment.

- At North Shore Studios in North Vancouver there is a company called William F Whites International which rents out the big production gear, because it is on site it is totally convenient. For those who are looking at investing in this business, it is worth looking at what William F Whites have in stock. http://www.whites.com/equipment/lighting-and-grip

- Another aspect of the film business that needs investment is trucking. The film trucks and trailers, portable toilets, transport trucks, grip trucks including cable laying trucks are vital for an expanding film industry.

- Vancouver has two film accounting payroll firms which all of the film companies use to process the pay cheques, E.P Canada and Cast and Crew.

http://www.epcanada.com/

http://castandcrew.com/

- Any business which increases the speed and efficiency of production brings comfort and reduces stress which will draw Film and TV production to Scotland.
How the issues that hinder the growth of creative industries can be overcome and how to capitalise on opportunities.

- There is a need for Film Studio production space in Scotland. There are already existing warehouses which can be converted to sound stages in and around the central belt of Scotland. Why build brand new buildings when sound stages are just sound insulated boxes with electricity, water and structural beams from which to hang rigging? Mammoth Studios in Burnaby B.C was a large storage warehouse for Sears Canada before it was converted into a sound stage, it's now owned by 20th Century Fox. Some sound stages in Vancouver are really quite small, but are still used for medium sized films, like First Ave Studios.

Mammoth website [http://mammothstudios.ca/stages/](http://mammothstudios.ca/stages/)

- Unfortunately Scotland does not have control of Corporation Tax or we could have introduced something similar to the Canadian and Provincial Film Tax Credits which are incentives to employ Canadian residents in BC, Quebec and Ontario, for every Canadian worker employed the film production gets a tax credit. B.C also has a tax credit incentive for productions which film in rural locations.

- Are there other incentives that Scotland can introduce to draw productions to employ workers based in Scotland?... Like cheap studio production and workshop space and cheap location filming in exchange for 'local hire' of skilled film technicians?

- Why are productions made for broadcast in this country being filmed on sets built and located in Poland and other Eastern European countries? We should be building and painting those sets in Scotland. And, why are technicians from London being imported to work on productions in Scotland instead of employing Scottish based technicians? This is not just a Scottish problem, it also occurs in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as well and they have control of corporation tax.

- It is vital to build upon existing training courses and encourage the expansion of the Film and TV technician training at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to include film production design, concept drawing, scenic construction, sculpture and scenic art /painting for film, special effects, metal workers, sign writing and fabrication, grips, lighting, script supervisors, production co-ordination and greens. The R.C.S already has an excellent costume department.

I was a graduate from the R.C.S where I studied scenic art and prop sculpture for theatre, but I had to build upon and adjust my skill set to suit the film industry. The scenic carpenters, painters and prop sculptors who graduate from the R.C.S are already at a very high skill standard and only need some additional classes or mentoring to acquire the relevant skill sets to advance quickly in the industry. I know of 3 other graduates from my year working in Film and TV in the areas of special effects, special effects make-up and scenic painting in Canada and the UK (London).

It is also important to encourage fledgling organisations like Digital Desperados or larger entrepreneurial operations like The Tower Digital Arts Centre in Helensburgh, because they are already successfully training people in Film and TV skills.
-Something that can be overlooked is film truck parking. It is important to secure longterm parking for the 'circus' when it is not in use. If a city loses its film truck parking because that location becomes prime real estate it can jeopardize the future of the film industry in Scotland. It is also important to train skilled location managers and traffic flaggers to oversee the circus parking on residential streets when in use.

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

If you want to retain a pool of people with Film & T.V creative skills, the questions to ask are:

How does one create an environment in which innovation and creativity can thrive?

And, How does one create an industry where people are not overworked and underpaid?

Why would freshly minted graduates want to stay and work in Film & T.V Scotland when the pay, working conditions and quality of life for Film technicians are so much better in other places?

-Currently (as I understand it to be the case) film & TV technicians in Scotland (and r’ UK) are independent contractors and have to pay for public liability insurance and are not eligible for Unemployment Benefits. In B.C, Canada, film & TV technicians are employees of the production and therefore do not have to pay for public liability insurance, because they are covered under the production policy. They also pay their taxes and National Insurance contributions and are eligible for Unemployment Benefits when they get laid off.

Should there be a different system for contract film workers in Scotland?.... Would being employed as an employee and contributing to Unemployment Insurance be better than being an independent contractor?... And if so, should the film production cover the public liability insurance instead of the individual paying out of pocket? This might be a way of reducing the barriers to becoming an employed film technician.

-This leads me to discuss unions, because it was I.A.T.S.E 891 who secured the pay rates, overtime rates (including 5 day week, hourly rates with weekend overtime), kit rental, high standards of health and safety, extended healthcare and employee status in B.C. I know we have B.E.C.T.U in Scotland, but B.E.C.T.U barely provides even the most basic of services as compared to the services provided by I.A.T.S.E Local 891 in Vancouver or I.A.S.T.E Local 514 Montreal, which even has its own (fancy) onsite training facilities for skills, safety training.

I.A.T.S.E seeks out and negotiates the productions, therefore they are closed shop in the departments for which the negotiated rates have been agreed, this has created stability for both the workforce and the employers because both sides know what to expect and there is an established process for negotiation. If there are to be changes in B.E.C.T.U Scotland, the changes must be a combination of member driven desire for change and there must be government legislation to allow some of the changes to occur.

I.A.T.S.E Local 891 in Vancouver is a combination of a guild and a labour union. Local 891 has more than 5000 members in a location with a similar population and area to the Central Belt of Scotland.

The Union system is not perfect, but it does greatly increase the quality of life of its
members and it does actually guarantee that those who stay members become committed film technicians. When you develop a large pool of talented and committed film technicians, you draw film productions like bees to honey. The success of the Vancouver (Hollywood North) film industry is almost entirely due to IATSE Local 891 and IATSE Local 669 (Camera) and the Directors Guild of Canada, without which there would not be a reliable constant pool of talented film technicians. If there were no technicians, there would not have been the investment in the sound stage infrastructure and pre-production workshops all across the lower mainland in BC. But, studios are just buildings... it is skilled people that make the Film industry.

-Scotland must develop a connected, solid, committed, expanding talent pool of technicians who desire to base themselves in Scotland. Currently, we are loosing talent every year when students graduate from the R.C.S and the various Art Schools and colleges across the country. There are many ex-pat Scots working in the film industry in Canada, the USA and New Zealand or Europe, who, like me, would be glad to get work at home in Scotland (I know of several). Can the Scottish Government create incentives for talented experienced technicians to return to Scotland to live, work and mentor the younger technicians new to the industry so we can develop our talent pool here?

-Cheap rent, studio space and affordable cost of living will be the main draws film technicians, actors, writers, musicians and other artists to Scotland, because creative people want to focus on their creative careers and not have to have a day job. Plus, the Film industry is usually feast or famine, so having a high rent is not sustainable unless you are employed all the time or are already independently wealthy. I could not have worked my way into the Film Industry if I had not had the luck of living in places with cheap rent.

-Why can't Scotland have a thriving Film & TV Industry like Quebec?...

Why does Montreal have such a thriving film, theatre, music, writing and arts scene?

Answer: Cheap real estate, rent, cost of living and studio space.

Rent was ridiculously cheap in the 1990's and only gradually increased over the last 7 years. As a result, artists, musicians and every creative person under the sun moved to Montreal particularly when rents in other parts of Canada increased. And, the locals trained in the creative industries and stayed in Quebec, because they could have a good quality of life. This has influenced the Film and T.V sector, Video Game sector, tourism, and all kinds of businesses. However, since Ubisoft, the Video Game company, moved into the Mile End area in Montreal this has caused more employment but it also caused the real estate and the rents to increase in price in that area, but thankfully Montreal has rent control so most people can still afford to stay put.

This phenomenon has been named the 'Brooklyn Domino Effect', because of the rapid and dramatic transformation of Brooklyn, NY fuelled by artists, creatives and hipsters. The property developers took advantage of the way that artists change neighbourhoods and bring economic revitalization, but now the artists and creatives can't afford to live in Brooklyn so they are moving elsewhere and the rich people are moving into the void. It has happened in Berlin, Vancouver's East Side and to some extent it is happening in Glasgow's East End as well. On one hand one wants an influx of film industry people, artists and other creatives, but on the other hand one wants to have a sustainable real estate and cost of living for everyone. It is vital that the Scottish Government takes this into
account so that there can be a long term plan for affordable housing.

-In Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto the most popular cheap housing is co-operative housing on a grand scale. There are many large scale apartment buildings in all three cities and the co-ops are usually very well run and factoried by the co-op members. Vancouver, Montreal and Amsterdam have artists housing co-ops which are 'creative hubs' in the cities. Many film professionals live in co-op housing. Some of the housing co-op buildings have been custom built with workshop and studio space or gallery space. If Scotland puts investment into this kind of co-op housing, it will be a magnet for film professionals and all other artists and creative professionals. See this link to Co-op Housing B.C http://www.chf.bc.ca/

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

-One of the things that Montreal is doing right in this area is that they have encouraged colleges to introduce courses for producers, film lawyers, production management (the money side), arts administration, arts and film production accounting and various other areas of the business side of the film and wider arts industries. This means that the people who are the creators do not have to be business people as well, they can concentrate on writing scripts and making the films and other kinds of art. Scotland needs to think in terms of developing the skills of the supporting business and entrepreneurial sector and to not expect the creators to be trying to drum up and maintain the business sector of Film and T.V.

Examples of successful international strategies for growing these sectors.

Please see links below to the BC and Ontario film production lists discussed above.

http://www.creativebc.com/crbc-services/motion-picture-services/film-list

http://www.omdc.on.ca/film_and_tv/Ontario_Film_Commission/in_production.htm

In the Video Games sector Ubisoft in Montreal has been very successful.

http://montreal.ubisoft.com/en

-It is worth looking at both the triumphs and the mistakes made by Telefilm Canada and the missed opportunities of not funding enough main stream, non-arty films as well as the arty ones. There was a missed opportunity to invest in a mainstream 'Home Grown' industry in order to be less dependent on Hollywood in anglophone Canada. Now that Telefilm's funding has been gutted, by the current Conservative Government, it has been restructured in a way that it is challenging for small indy productions to get any funding at all.

http://www.telefilm.ca/en/?q=en

-The Quebec funding for the Film & T.V Industry has seemed much more sensible when it comes to investing in mainstream money making films. The Quebec domestic film production is very successful and brings in a lot of money to the province. Quebec exports most of its films, moreover, the Quebec population support home grown production at the
cinema box office and they watch Quebec productions on T.V.

Quebec Film and Television Council

http://www.qftc.ca/filming-in-quebec/filmed-in-quebec/

-The National Film Board of Canada is something that Canada did do right until the current Conservative government gutted it. The old model for the NFB would work well in Scotland for the Documentary and Animation sector, but perhaps on a smaller scale initially.

https://www.nfb.ca/

-The Canadian and Provincial Film Tax Credits which are incentives to employ film technicians and actors who are Canadian residents in BC, Quebec and Ontario. For every Canadian worker employed the film production gets a tax credit and there is a further tax credit if you are living and working in the same province as the production. B.C also has a tax credit incentive for productions which film in rural locations.

-Look into the functioning of film unions and Directors Guild in Canada and Quebec, especially I.A.T.S.E Locals 891 in Vancouver and 514 in Montreal. I am not sure if it is only on I.A.T.S.E productions, but films made in B.C have a bond agreement with the production company, which means the production company pays out a bond deposit at the beginning of production to cover pay cheques of the workers if the film goes bust. This creates more stability and trust in the production company.

Vancouver, I.A.T.S.E 891 website http://iatse.com/

Vancouver, I.A.T.S.E 669 http://www.ia669.com/

Montreal, I.A.T.S.E 514 https://www.iatse514.net/en/

Montreal, AQTIS is the Film union that makes 'home grown' productions in Quebec http://www.aqtis.qc.ca/

Directors Guild of Canada, Vancouver http://www.dgc.ca/bc/

Producers in Quebec are represented by AQPM


I hope you find my submission useful and I look forward to hearing the outcome from this committee.

Regards,

Ben Owens, Scenic Artist.

January 2015