Submission from the Association of Film and Television Practitioners Scotland (AFTPS)

The Association of Film and Television Practitioners Scotland (AFTPS) is a lobbying group, set up by film and television freelancers to campaign for more film and television production in Scotland. Set up in 2009 by a group of over 300 freelancers, the group agreed to lobby on four basic principles:

- An increase in Scottish-based TV commissioning;
- A national studio/production space for Scotland, capable of attracting productions to the country;
- Greater support for indigenous Scottish-based production companies;
- A review of current public sector funding for film and television in Scotland in the light of increased competition both within the UK and abroad.

Since AFTPS was formed, it has been involved in the Film Sector Review and Strategy produced by Creative Scotland, as well as giving evidence to the EET Committee on the creative industries, and the Scottish Affairs Committee on the state of the Film and Television industry in Scotland. It has members from all areas of Screen production and all grades from seasoned Heads of Departments to new entrants to the industry. The Association has a very active Facebook group that currently has 1,778 Members. AFTPS has a seat on the Screen Sector Leadership group that was formed as a result of the EET committee’s report of 31st March 2015.

AFTPS on the whole welcomed the recommendations of the report although our members feel that a dedicated Screen Agency would be more effective in delivering the goals laid out in the committee’s report. Of the key recommendations in the screen sector part of the report, only the establishment of the Screen Sector Leadership group has come to fruition. This group has now had two meetings. We would urge for a more active buy-in from Scottish Enterprise for the Screen Sector Leadership group, and a commitment to work with the group.

The continuing delays of the “Studio Delivery Group” which has yet to even report its work despite being in existence for three years and despite press reports that an announcement is due soon. AFTPS accepts that the agencies of the Scottish Government must abide by European State Aid regulations. This is presumably true of other nations in the UK. Wales has two major studios with six stages, and Northern Ireland also has two major studios with six stages and with plans for more studios in development. Combined, these two small nations of the UK have four studios with twelve stages. Scotland, a country that has a greater population and over double the land mass of Wales and Northern Ireland combined, has none. Sony has converted a warehouse in Cumbernauld for the filming of “Outlander” but this is not large enough for major feature films and it is unlikely to be available in the near future.

Both Northern Ireland and Wales are nations with dedicated screen agencies and with governments that appreciate the economic benefits of having a strong screen sector, which unlike many art forms, is a net contributor to the economy. Not only does production cost money – and this is a direct spend into the local economy, with jobs, local services, and goods being used – the additional benefits of film and
television tourism, training opportunities, re-skilling of local people, promotion and PR bring additional direct revenue and benefits. A feature film will spend one-third of its budget in production costs: the direct spend in Glasgow on World War Z was £5 million pounds, but this would have been higher if they had stayed longer. This was a big budget production: Taggart (STV) spent the same amount filming in Glasgow each year, but over a longer-time frame.

Pentland Studios

We feel the most urgent need in Scotland is to build up our facilities and house both in-coming and indigenous production.

A private company has seen the potential of Scotland and is wishing to build a studio complex comprising six stages and water tank facility costing £140mil on the outskirts of Edinburgh [http://scottishinternationalstudios.com](http://scottishinternationalstudios.com)

The plans were submitted to Midlothian Council for outline planning permission in May 2015. The company, PSL Holdings, have been working with Midlothian Council for three years prior to applying for planning permission, and eventually had to appeal to Scottish Ministers on the grounds that Midlothian Council had failed to come to a decision within their allotted time. It was only after a letter-writing campaign by AFTPS members and the presence of an online petition drawing press attention that on 14 December it was announced that due to the importance of the project, the decision would be made by ministers after receiving the Reporter’s findings on 21 April 2016. We remain confused as to why, after Scottish Enterprise have repeatedly warned about State Aid being a block to developing a studio with public money, that a company offering to build a studio complex with private money would not be seen immediately as a development of national significance.

There still fails to be any notable announcements to be made by the “Studio Delivery Group” for any kind of national film studio, and we suspect that the public sector is waiting to see whether the Pentland bid will be successful. We would like to state that we will support any initiative to develop studios and dedicated production spaces, and see no reason why three studio complexes could not be supported around Edinburgh, Glasgow and Cumbernauld. This scale of development would push Scotland into a world class facility. Delays, deferred decisions and vacillating only serve to show that Scotland is not open for business.

The film industry, nationally and internationally, is booming at the moment. Brad Pitt’s latest film is currently shooting in a warehouse and car park because there is no studio available nationally. Our members have plenty of anecdotal evidence of the lack of suitable studio spaces across the UK. As delays continue, we are missing out on potential inward investment. The Culture Minister, Fiona Hyslop, proudly announced that last year (2014) that the industry grew by £12m to £46m [Ref Creative Scotland] last year. AFTPS welcome this increase in production activity, but point out that the total value of the UK production activity in 2014 was £1,471 billion [Ref BFI]. So Scotland’s share of the UK film and high-end film production is little more than 3% of the UK industry despite having a wealth of remarkable locations and freelance crew, many of which need to travel down south to gain employment. We aspire to coming close to 10% of the UK total figure.
AFTPS would ask the committee to recommend that Creative Scotland and Scottish Enterprise adhere to the recommendations of your report.

Yours sincerely

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