Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee
Scotland’s Screen Sector
Written submission from Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Introduction
Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee’s inquiry into Scotland’s Screen Sector.

Over the past ten years, we have recognised the importance of the screen sector to the Highlands and Islands, both in economic terms and also for its wider value to rural communities and culturally. We have actively been involved in the sector across this period and have witnessed incredible change during that time, particularly with the launch of BBC Alba and its presence in the Western Isles.

HIE has worked in partnership with the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Enterprise on the development of proposals for the new Screen Unit, which is to be housed in Creative Scotland. This work looked at the report produced by the Scottish Screen Leadership Group, current support provision and demand, and analysis of future industry trends and demand. Staff at all levels across HIE have been involved in the various project groups and workstreams, ranging from our Chief Executive to the Creative Industries Team and HIE account managers.

We are pleased to support the implementation plan that has been developed, particularly in its recognition of the importance of sector-specific support. We also welcome the recognition that to grow the sector across the whole of Scotland, it is vital to acknowledge that variations exist across Scotland in terms of geography, scale of business and existing support mechanisms. Ensuring the best possible complementarity of existing services, as well as developing new options, is a positive step towards the continued growth of this crucial economic sector.

Increased funding for film and television production
HIE warmly welcomes the significant increase in funding relating to the new TV channel in Scotland, as well as digital developments, and the additional £10m of funding in 2018/19 for screen development, production and growth funding. This will increase the chances of ambitious businesses across rural Scotland being able to take advantage of the opportunities that appear to be on the horizon. Namely, potential increased spend by broadcasters, the roll out of high speed broadband, and obviously the development of the new Scottish channel.

With partners, HIE will continue to work with screen businesses in our region to help maximise the opportunities being created.
Business development support and skills

Again, HIE welcomes the recommendations outlined in the proposal. We already work closely and collaborate with the other partner agencies. We have account managed relationships with innovative companies, such as Trix Pix based in South Uist, Young Films on Skye and MAC TV in Stornoway. These businesses are extremely important to the rural economy in their areas. We have also developed a sector-specific programme of support for small screen enterprises. Based on a network model, this gives industry a voice in the assistance they require and they are actively engaged in the delivery of that support as well. This has resulted in a flexible bespoke service that has great reach into the sector.

Annually, HIE invests up to £500,000 in screen-based activity, and through its network programme has delivered over 1,500 interventions to screen businesses of varying levels of maturity in the Highlands and Islands over a three year period (Oct 2014-Oct 2017). We welcome the opportunity to work closely with the screen unit to build on this work.

HIE fully agrees that speed of change in the sector means that skills constantly need to be developed within businesses, as well as encouraging collaboration to bring new skills to a business. We welcome the proposals and will certainly continue to work with partners, especially SDS, to ensure that the broadest range of appropriate training and skills development opportunities are available. Currently, this takes the form of workshops and seminars aimed at businesses, often delivered by industry or by industry bodies; access to industry for young people; and, increasingly, in conjunction with industry and FE/HE together. The proposals offer great scope to build on this work and to develop the linkages across Scotland and further afield.

Robust research and statistics

Whilst HIE does undertake research in the sector, we recognise there is a shortage of robust data, not only for our region, but for Scotland as a whole. There are a variety of reasons for this, but it will be immensely valuable to have a single source of data and statistics available.

This would enable all partners to monitor and evaluate progress with sector development.

Conclusion

HIE welcomes the proposals being put forward. By ensuring better collaboration across the public sector, we can ensure that our screen businesses benefit from additional support that is available nationally. We also believe there is great potential for this approach to offer a significant step change in the sector itself, whether from increased capacity in the businesses, access to wider networks and finance, or from up-skilling. HIE looks forward to continuing to play an active part in supporting the sector.