Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Scotland’s Screen Sector

Joint written submission from GBM Casting, All Talent Agency and Real People

Key Points

● Scotland’s screen sector has significant potential for growth but due to a number of structural barriers and lack of a strategic promotion approach growth is stalling

● Growth in the sector can only be sustained with a pool of talented experienced Supporting Artists.

● Scottish Casting Agencies require a level playing field across the UK if we are to be able to compete fairly for future film production work

Background

Scotland’s Casting Agencies play an important role in the ecosystem of Scotland’s screen sector, finding and placing Supporting Artists to the TV, film and advertising industries.

It’s essential to the future success of the wider film industry in Scotland to have a strong current stable of companies that supply talented experienced Supporting Artists.

We agree with the sentiments of the Screen Sector Leadership Group’s Report to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee in January 2017, which stated:

“A lively, thriving screen sector makes an important contribution to our national life and brings significant cultural and economic benefits.”

Despite the overall growth of Scotland’s screen industry over the past decade, our organisations continue to face many of the same challenges as others in this sector. The Leadership Group’s report was also clear that:

“Many production teams come to Scotland, make their film and depart leaving no legacy in terms of contribution to the long-term sustainability of the industry.”

This is the essence of the key challenge that Casting Agencies, based in Scotland currently face, and which must be addressed if the sector is able to continue to support the wider industry, benefit from future expansion and contribute to the economic health of Scotland’s talented and willing performing arts community through equal access to opportunity.

The Challenge

Casting Agencies based in Scotland have not been able to benefit from recent inward investment from productions such as "Outlaw King" a Sigma Films production and "Mary Queen of Scots" a Working Title production, which have used London-based casting agents to find Supporting Artists for filming that has taken place in Scotland.

This approach has a number of structural disadvantages for the sector in Scotland:

- Short-term loss of business impacts on the overall capacity of Scottish-based Casting Agents
- By recruiting new talent from scratch (as outside agencies must do) the service provided to major film productions from Scottish talent will be compromised, damaging the product and hampering the reputation and future development of the sector.
- Agencies are less well equipped to deal with the peaks and troughs of feature films business through loss of talent to other parts of the UK

The Solution

A strong, sustainable Scottish Screen sector needs a competitive range of Casting Agencies in place who are able to meet the demands of a profitable, growing, market.

The UK film industry is a key economic driver of economic growth hence why Scotland’s three largest Casting Agencies support the view of Creative Scotland, when they wrote in their 2014 report “Review of the film sector in Scotland”2:

“For those involved in production the simple truth is that there is not enough production in Scotland to ensure they can make a living each year.”

“Whilst recognising that EU state aid regulations make the awarding of incentive funding to encourage inward production difficult, it seems evident that without incentives it will be hard for Scotland to compete with other areas of the UK and internationally. This intertwines with the debate about studio development and the need to incentivise business for those putative facilities. Linking spend-based incentives to engagement of crew, as in Northern Ireland, adds benefits for talent retention. Further investigation of this area is essential for the industry.”

While these sentiments are welcome we have not seen any evidence of the positive advancement of these proposals since the publication of this report 3 years ago.

Best practice from other parts of the UK, and in particular from Wales and Northern Ireland, suggests that the distribution of public funding tied to the appropriate use of Community Benefit Clauses can strike the balance between generating additional inward investment while supporting home based businesses.

For example, Film Wales has taken a proactive approach in ensuring that Welsh talent, crew and companies benefit from productions which receive funding from their Development Fund. In order to achieve this, Film Wales set out clear conditions in their development funding guidelines and ask for specific examples of how Welsh organisations will benefit in any funding applications.

This proactive approach has seen recent victories for the film sector in Wales, including the use of Welsh talent, crew and companies in the filming of the Netflix production “Apostle” in early 2017.

Similarly, Northern Ireland Screen have demonstrated their commitment to building a strong local sector by ensuring that recipients of the Northern Ireland Screen Fund are committed to investing in the local sector:

> The production fund is open to all legally incorporated companies who can fulfil the British Cultural Criteria and the Project Criteria. Incoming productions will be required to spend a proportion of the total production budget in Northern Ireland, typically a 5:1 spend ratio would be expected.3

This commitment has direct benefits for Casting Agencies based in Northern Ireland.

We believe that Creative Scotland and Scottish Enterprise should demonstrate a similar commitment to the Scottish screen sector, and Casting Agencies in particular, and take concrete action to ensure that productions which receive public or lottery funding are required to support local talent and businesses.

Furthermore, public bodies should follow the best practice set out by Film Wales and Northern Ireland Screen and publish a plan through which they will proactively promote Scottish-based crew infrastructure facilities and agencies that supply Supporting Artists.

Our proposal

We share the view of the Screen Sector Leadership Group’s Report to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee in January 2017 that the screen sector in Scotland remains under-developed and retains significant potential for growth.

In order to facilitate this expansion, we believe that Creative Scotland and Scottish Enterprise should work together to ensure that appropriate conditions are in place for those productions which receive public funding to ensure that Scottish-based organisations receives a fair share of the production work.

Such a development would be warmly welcomed by Scotland’s casting Agencies, and would be a significant and positive step in the right direction for the sector.