
A Stand Alone Agency

There is no doubt that there is widespread support across the screen sector for Scotland to have its own, autonomous, standalone screen agency. That view is also reflected in the SSLG.

There is also no doubt about the frustration felt across the sector as Scotland has fallen behind other parts of the UK in developing screen activity. The proposal for an enhanced Screen Unit within Creative Scotland was designed to put this right. There is momentum behind this proposal. Its plans are well advanced: increased funds are available to be invested in projects during the current financial year; the appointments process to create a new screen leadership team is well underway; the new agency is ready to be launched when these appointments are announced.

The SSLG wants these plans to be fully implemented as soon as possible. It does not want them to be compromised or delayed while consideration is given to a different approach.

Once the Unit is fully operational, attention will be focussed on its decisions and its outputs. Its work will be under intense scrutiny not least from the sector and the Parliament. Within its first two years it should be possible to judge whether it is on course to achieve the step change that is seen to be so necessary across the industry. During that period all our energies should be devoted to making it a success.

If it is then considered that there would be tangible gains to be made from its further evolution into a separate agency then the evidence will be available on which to base a business assessment and cost benefit analysis. It has been noted that the creation of a standalone agency would require legislation and that this process could take up to two years. None of this should be allowed to divert the Screen Unit from its central tasks.

Governance

The SSLG has discussed the ‘cumbersome governance arrangements’. The SSLG has made representations to Creative Scotland about these arrangements and has been encouraged to believe that they are being revised.

We believe that the Board of Creative Scotland should be supported by two separate sub-groups devoted to the work of the Screen Unit, each chaired by a Board member with screen experience.

The first Committee would bring the partner agencies together to scrutinise the delivery of their agreed Business Plan. The Business plan would be jointly owned by Creative Scotland and the Partner Agencies with ‘collective transparency and accountabilities for delivering outputs and outcomes’ and ‘strategic alignment of
deliverables, phasing, duration, outputs and outcomes’. These plans are currently being finalised and it is crucially important that the partner agencies cannot resile from being held accountable for their actions.

In its Report of March 2015 your predecessor Committee found that the separate and distinct remits of Scottish Enterprise and Creative Scotland were acting as a barrier to working cohesively. The creation of this separate Committee is an attempt to address that. We know that bringing agencies together in a Committee does not ensure that action will follow. The people concerned have to be committed to making it happen. It is crucially important, therefore, that the work of this Committee is transparent and closely scrutinised. We recognise that it would also be helpful to have industry representatives as members of this Committee to inform their discussions.

It is important, however, that there is also a separate Advisory Group from the screen sector to offer advice and support to the screen leadership team and the Creative Scotland Board. Its membership and the frequency of its meetings would be flexible; it would be ‘fleet of foot’ and ensure that the screen team had close contacts with the industry and was kept informed of initiatives and developments. We had positive discussions with the Chief Executive of Creative Scotland on this matter at our meeting on 27 March. [Once this Advisory Group was in place the SSLG would be wound up].

We believe it is important for the CTEER Committee to continue to scrutinise this work, giving special attention to the partner agencies being held to account for the delivery of the agreed strategy.